

**"IT'S A WORKIN' MAN'S TOWN":  
CLASS AND CULTURE IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO**

by

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis examines aspects of White male working-class culture in Thunder Bay, Ontario. It focuses on the manner in which the perception of social contradictions is expressed in non-class discourses. A popular form of softball is analyzed as a ritual which illustrates how opposition is expressed through the inversion of dominant cultural themes. Images of "Indians" are shown to be a means of representing an "other" against which the White male working class defines itself, and of symbolizing alienation from the power bloc located in the southern portion of the province. The efficacy of these oppositional practices is limited by their subordination to commonsense. Although not unique to the working class, commonsense as a mode of thought has a particular connotation in working-class culture because it represents an inversion of dominant ideas about knowledge. Furthermore, the emphasis on the obvious, typical of commonsense thought, mitigates the development of a critical perspective and thus contributes to the reproduction of the hegemonic culture.

## RESUME

Cette thèse examine quelques aspects de la culture de la classe ouvrière blanche à Thunder Bay en Ontario. Elle étudie la façon dont la perception de contradictions sociales s'exprime dans des discours qui au premier abord ne semblent pas se rapporter aux conditions de classe. Une forme de jeu de balle-molle est analysée comme un rituel dans lequel des oppositions s'expriment par l'inversion de thèmes de la culture dominante. L'image que les Blancs se forment des Indiens sert à représenter un "autre" par contraste avec qui les travailleurs se définissent. Cette image de l'Indien sert aussi à symboliser leur aliénation du sud de la province qui est le siège du pouvoir. L'efficacité de ces pratiques oppositionnelles est limitée par l'usage du sens commun, rejetant toute forme d'intellectualisme. Ce mode de pensée, qui n'est pas limité à la classe ouvrière, comporte pourtant une connotation particulière dans leur culture puisqu'il représente une inversion des idées dominantes concernant la connaissance. D'autre part, l'attribut fondamental du sens commun qui est de souligner ce qui est évident atténue le développement d'une perspective critique et contribue donc à la reproduction de la culture hégémonique.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Aim of the Thesis

Problematizing the ordinary, the routine, the everyday is a necessary project for a truly critical social science. The enduring importance of a work such as Barthes' Mythologies (1973) is that it brings the ordinary stuff of everyday life into a sharp focus and reveals how it is related to ideology and the exercise of power. Objects and practices normally taken for granted are shown to be social symbols with political significance.

This thesis analyzes aspects of the culture of young White working-class men in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This culture is prosaic rather than poetic. It revolves around the local and immediate; it celebrates the ordinary, the profane; what is often referred to as mass culture. I illustrate the way this culture is intimately related to a sense of class, and how resistance to a perceived dominant culture is expressed and deflected into non-class discourses. I focus specifically on leisure, ethnicity and regionalism, showing how they relate to a preferred form of thought which is rooted in the local working-class experience.

The description and analysis is a contribution to the ongoing debate on the nature of the contemporary Western working class, and the relationship between domination and

consent within the modern capitalist State. It is an examination of the degree to which White working-class men are able to understand their own position in contemporary capitalist society, and the limitations of this perception. To date, few anthropologists have taken part in this discussion. Practitioners of industrial anthropology have for the most part maintained a rather narrow focus on the labour process. They have not systematically addressed the broader issues of class and consciousness.<sup>1</sup> This is unfortunate because the debate revolves around an issue that has been the concern of anthropologists since the inception of the discipline, namely, the question of culture and its relation to economic, political and ideological phenomena. Historians, sociologists, political scientists and literary critics are engaged in an argument over the usefulness of the concept of culture and anthropological methods such as participant observation in the analysis of working-class life.

The argument developed in this thesis is very simple. The celebration of the local, the ordinary, of mass culture by the male working class in Thunder Bay is itself a form of class resistance to their subordination, but it is a reaction which inevitably entails strict limitations and is therefore easily diverted in other directions.

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<sup>1</sup> See Burawoy (1979) and Holzberg and Giovannini (1981) for reviews of the literature on industrial anthropology.

Discussing issues such as ethnic prejudice and sexism among the male working class can be hazardous because there is already a widespread image of the bigoted and authoritarian working man -- an Archie Bunker, to refer to one of its better known incarnations -- and one does not wish to appear to contribute to this stereotype, which is itself a form of bigotry. Many Marxist analyses ignore these phenomena among the working class and concentrate on beliefs and activities which conform to ideas about what correct class consciousness ought to be. But romantic images of the worker as the honest man, rough cut perhaps, but a "real person" struggling to maintain his dignity in a world that gives him no respect, or alternatively as an actual or potential revolutionary, politically involved, trying to preserve communal ideals against the onslaught of individuating and alienating structures of capitalism can be just as obfuscating and politically hazardous as negative bourgeois images of the working class.

It is difficult to write about the working class without getting caught up in these competing representations of what the working class is really like. Let me start, then, with a couple of caveats: When I discuss, for instance, ethnic prejudice and sexism among the White male working class of Northwestern Ontario I am not suggesting that these individuals are more bigoted or sexist than any other group in society. The argument is simply that these

phenomena are an element in the culture of the working-class men I have studied and lived among, and as such must be examined. They are discourses and practices with their own logic which could be studied on a society-wide basis. I argue that they have a specific meaning in working-class consciousness because of the class experience, and the mode of thought which this experience generates. I am trying to steer through a passageway clogged with boulders of romanticism on one side and intellectual snobbery on the other. The working class is neither essentially good, nor essentially bad; it is a complex social grouping which contains many positive features and some less admirable qualities.<sup>2</sup>

### Methodology

#### Defining the Working Class

For the purposes of this thesis, I have employed the definition of the working class proposed by Eric Olin Wright (1976:30-31). There are three economic criteria: lack of control over the physical means of production, absence of control over investments and the process of accumulation, and absence of control over other people's labour-power.

In Wright's scheme the working class is distinguished from the bourgeoisie in that the bourgeoisie has control

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<sup>2</sup> Hoggart (1957:13-18) very clearly discusses the problem of romanticism in the analysis of working-class culture.



over the three phenomena the working class does not. In other words, the bourgeoisie controls the physical means of production, investments and the process of accumulation, and other people's labour power.

The petty bourgeoisie is differentiated from the working class because it controls the physical means of production, investments and the process of accumulation, but is like the proletariat in that it does not control other people's labour power. The petty bourgeoisie, therefore, shares certain features with both the working class and the bourgeoisie. However, the petty bourgeoisie is a class within the petty commodity mode of production, whereas the working class and the bourgeoisie are the two fundamental classes in the capitalist mode of production. Thus, the petty bourgeoisie is not to be understood as an intermediate class between the bourgeoisie and the working class in a tripartite hierarchy.

This definition of the working class is wider than that proposed by Poulantzas (1978), for whom the working class includes only those workers who both produce surplus-value and are engaged in "productive labour." According to Poulantzas, in the capitalist mode of production productive labour is "labour that produces surplus-value while directly reproducing the material elements that serve as the substratum of the relation of exploitation: labour that is directly involved in material production by producing use-

values that increase material wealth" (Poulantzas 1978:216).

Such a definition is too narrow. Marx's own definition of productive labour, from the viewpoint of the capitalist mode of production, is wider than Poulantzas's.

Since the immediate purpose and the authentic product of capitalist production is surplus-value, labour is only productive, and an exponent of labour-power is only a productive worker, if it or he creates surplus-value directly, i.e. the only productive labour is that which is directly consumed in the course of production for the valorization of capital (Marx 1977:1038).

Elsewhere Marx provides an example which clearly contradicts Poulantzas's narrow definition of productive labour. In the capitalist mode of production,

The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes to the self-valorization of capital. If we may take an example from outside the sphere of material production, a schoolmaster is a productive worker when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his pupils, he works himself into the ground to enrich the owner of the school. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, makes no difference to the relation. The concept of a productive worker therefore implies not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of his work, but also a specifically social relation of production, a relation with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital's direct means of valorization. To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune (Marx 1977:644).

While economic criteria are crucial to the definition of class, they are not sufficient in themselves. Class formation and dissolution is an ongoing process which involves political, ideological and cultural factors, as

well as relations of production. "Classes are not given uniquely by any objective positions because they constitute effects of struggles, and these struggles are not determined uniquely by the relations of production" (Przeworski 1977:367). The working class as a whole is centred upon individuals who occupy a proletarian position in the relations of production but it involves more than just these individuals. In a given conjuncture it is possible that people who occupy contradictory class positions in the relations of production, or who like the petty bourgeoisie are involved in a non-capitalist mode of production, may or may not adopt working-class positions in the class struggle.

Contemporary capitalist societies (and industrialized socialist societies as well) include a high degree of fragmentation and specialization in the sphere of production which cuts across class lines. Cultural, ideological and political factors may exacerbate intra-class divisions or may contribute to the process of class formation despite these divisions.

In the informal group from which much of the descriptive material in this thesis is drawn the individuals are involved in a wide variety of jobs. There are unskilled labourers from a paper mill, skilled tradesmen, a waiter, a warehouse employee, a forest-fire fighter, a photographer and a couple of civil servants. Not all of these individuals are productive workers in Marx's sense of the

term, nor do they all occupy unambiguous proletarian positions in the relations of production. The cultural world I describe in the thesis is centred upon people who are proletarian, but it is not limited to them. Indeed, my informants' idea that Thunder Bay, where most of the fieldwork was carried out, is a "workin' man's town" illustrates their perception that working-class values colour the culture of the entire city, even though not all of its inhabitants are working class in a strictly economic sense.

The concept "working class" is not a part of the everyday vocabulary of the people I studied, although they recognized its accuracy when I explained what I meant by the term. They normally described themselves as "middle class", thereby denoting their position in a tripartite hierarchy based on wealth. In one of their images of society there are three distinct classes: the very rich, or the upper class; those who are neither rich nor poor, who form the middle class (where they locate themselves); and the poor, who form the lower class. They also frequently speak in terms that indicate a dualistic conception of society. They refer to themselves as "the average man", or "the ordinary Joe", in opposition to "the big shots", or "important people". But their everyday language also contains words which refer to one's place in the relations of production. Concepts such as "the working man", "the poor working

stiff", "a hard hat", "the lunch bucket brigade", connote a certain kind of work experience which is perceived to be different from that of others.

### The Informal Group

The informal group is a central feature of male working-class culture. It can be understood as an opposition to the formal structures of school during childhood and work in adult life, but also to the bureaucracy in the modern state. Paul Willis sees the distinction between formal and informal as fundamental to working-class culture. "In working class culture generally opposition is frequently marked by a withdrawal into the informal and expressed in its characteristic mode just beyond the reach of 'the rule'" (Willis 1977:22-23).

Within the workplace one of the ongoing struggles is to gain informal control of the labour process. "Systematic soldiering" and "gold bricking" are two well-documented practices.<sup>3</sup> In the three years I spent working respectively in a paper mill, two different copper mines, and a grain elevator, and the additional summers during high school when I was employed with a cartage company and a feed mill, I observed, and indeed participated in, the endless attempt to gain a measure of control over the job. Stretching coffee

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<sup>3</sup> These are terms used to describe informal means of controlling the pace of production by working slowly.

breaks, extra visits to the washroom, hiding in a part of the work site the foreman was unlikely to visit, working as slowly as possible ("fucking the dog" in the local vernacular), deliberately breaking thread and needles in the bagging room of the grain elevator, piling sacks of malt so they would fall over -- all of these, and many other practices, were attempts to control the intensity of the work and to limit management's expectations of what could or should be accomplished in a given period of time. The basis of this struggle is the informal group on the shopfloor. "It is the massive presence of this informal organisation which most decisively marks off shopfloor culture from middle class cultures of work" (Willis 1977:54).

The informal group is also the basis of the joking and bantering that fill up a large portion of the work day. This social aspect of the job is where meaning and satisfaction is to be found, rather than in the work itself. "It's the people you work with that make a job enjoyable. As long as you got a good bunch of guys to work with, that's all that matters," I was told by one informant, now retired. This statement reflects the dominant attitude towards work and indicates how it is through cultural practices that an alienating situation is invested with meaning.

The informal group exists outside the workplace as well. Any individual is likely to be involved in more than one informal group. In addition to the informal group at

work there is often another or several others outside of work. Informal groups may overlap to a certain extent; because of their informality they tend to have fluid boundaries. There are a core of friends and then people who participate more or less intensely in group activities, and who are thus more or less marginal to the group. Moreover, the group is always in a process of flux. Membership is a matter of friendship and shared interests. As these develop and wane the individuals in any informal group change.

The informal group I belonged to existed outside of the workplace. Throughout the thesis I refer to the members of the group as 'The Boys'. Statements such as "hanging out with the boys", "being one of the boys", "he is one of the boys", "acting like one of the boys", are all local ways of referring to the phenomenon of the male informal group and the subcultural practices which are related to it. Shared interest in certain leisure activities, especially sport and drinking was the primary *raison d'être* of the group. It is difficult to put an exact number on the size of the group because the boundaries fluctuate and the group overlapped with others. In Chapter Two I describe the seventeen individuals who were the most active in the informal group in 1984. Each of these individuals belonged to a variety of social networks and sometimes other friends came along to drink beer, or play softball. In the bar after a baseball game, for instance, the boundaries of the various informal

groups become more malleable. Membership in one group makes one part of a larger community, an extended informal group, involving between 100 and 300 people, including wives and girlfriends.

#### On Insider Research

The aim and inspiration of this thesis are at once personal and theoretical. The desire to undertake the project derives from my own life history as well as certain theoretical issues which are discussed in Chapter One. Rather than maintain the fiction that somehow the personal and theoretical can be separated, in the pages that follow the two are intertwined. I have placed myself within the ethnography. This is particularly important in this case because the field work upon which the thesis is based was carried out not just "at home" in the sense of in my own society and culture, but "at home" where I was born and grew to adulthood.

Anthropologists have been interested in their own cultures since the discipline began (Spindler and Spindler 1983:49). Despite this fact, some anthropologists feel that research in one's own culture entails special methodological problems that are not encountered by those studying a foreign society. The perception of structures and patterns in one's own culture is thought to be inhibited because the researcher is too close to home: "too much is too familiar



to be noticed or to arouse the curiosity essential to research" (Aguilar 1981:16). Furthermore, it is suggested that insider research is inherently biased because the researcher is intimately involved in the culture he or she is studying (Aguilar 1981:16).

In response to these claims, some individuals argue that insider research is more effective than ethnographic research undertaken in a foreign culture because the greater familiarity one has with one's own culture makes it easier to recognize subtle but important differences, and generally simplifies the process of data collection. That the culture is lived by the researcher, rather than merely observed, is thought to enable a greater understanding in the subjective or emic sense. The shock of exposure to a radically different culture may actually impede research, and the outsider status of the researcher may render data collection more difficult and block the development of a subjective appreciation of the culture as it is lived. Moreover, the anthropologist working in an exotic setting brings the biases of his or her own culture and the analysis is inevitably ethnocentric to some extent (Aguilar 1981:17-24).

Questions of bias and perception are significant issues for all social scientists. They are not solved simply by travelling to a foreign locale or by staying in familiar cultural surroundings. The argument about insider research, regardless of whether one is for or against it, is based

upon the erroneous assumption that the anthropologists' own cultures are homogeneous and undifferentiated (Aguilar 1981:25). Anthropologists, by the very fact they are anthropologists, are always to some extent outside the group they are studying unless their subject of research is other anthropologists, and even then there are ethnic, gender, regional and intellectual differences that create boundaries. Inside and outside are, after all, relative concepts. The solutions to problems of perception and objectivity, in so far as they exist, are to be found in honesty, self-reflexivity and criticism. It is not a matter of where one is, but how critically attuned one is to the structures and practices that generate and limit one's own place in a complex system of differences and similarities. The experience of culture shock may aid in the recognition of one's own cultural traditions, of the relativity of one's own culture, of what it is that "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living", to borrow a phrase Marx used in a different context (Marx 1978:9), but it is no guarantee of this, or of observational clarity. From a methodological point of view there is no inherent advantage in doing research either at home or abroad.

In this particular case, my personal experience was important in generating some of the basic questions this thesis is concerned with. My family background is working class. I quit high school after grade twelve without a

university matriculation and went to work as an unskilled manual labourer. This decision had very little to do with a need for money. My family enjoyed a "normal", "comfortable" standard of living; in the terms of functionalist sociology we were middle class. Rather, my decision to leave school was related to the fact that I became part of a subculture in which "intellectual" pursuits, as they are defined by a Faculty of Arts at a university, are devalued. By the time I was in grade twelve I wanted to get a job "where one made good money", such as in a paper mill, grain elevator, or on the railroads. I wanted to have enough of my own money to buy my own things, a stereo, records, a car, to spend on the weekend, and perhaps to travel. Others might continue their education and go on to well-paid, comfortable, professional careers, but who wanted to be like them, the "suckholes"? So I was happy to get my first job in a feed mill; my father, through his work, knew the owner.

During the next three years, I had a number of jobs. I spent the summer in the feed mill. I was laid off in September. Almost immediately I was hired at a papermill; the mother of a high school friend worked in the office. I was laid-off just before Christmas. By then I had saved enough money to finance a trip to Europe. When I came back in April I could not find a "good job" in the elevators or mills, and so I worked pumping gas at a tourist resort 120 miles west of Thunder Bay. Luckily, within two weeks of

starting this terribly low-paid and unprestigious work I happened to have a high school acquaintance as a customer. He was working in the warehouse of a copper mine under construction 100 kilometres further west. They needed people. Was I interested? After five months at the mine several of us had a chance to go to another copper mine in northern B.C. near the Alaskan panhandle. It was where "really good money" was made, and it was easy to save since you were only allowed out of the mine camp once every three or four months. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the price of copper fell in 1974, and after only four months I was laid-off. So I returned to Thunder Bay and by April of 1975 I was employed at a local grain elevator; my father knew the superintendent.

By this time, the monotonous reality of unskilled work had made its impression upon me. I had also discovered that, even though I was part of "the gang", the informal group on the job, I was not very good at the kinds of joking and bantering with which people fill up the dead space of that kind of work. Indeed, in the track shed at the elevator that was what I was "known" for. The art of the quick repartee was beyond me.

It is difficult to recount why I decided to go to university. As with leaving high school, the decision was not the result of some process of career planning. As I remember it, I was simply looking for something to do

because I was bored and so I enrolled as a mature part-time student at the local university. I took a course in anthropology at night while I was working at the grain elevator. In the spring I applied to the University of Alberta in Edmonton because I had a friend who had moved there (he worked for the city as a tree pruner) and in 1976 "everyone" was going to Alberta as a consequence of the oil boom. As it happened, I had some interesting anthropology professors and did well in my courses. Only then did the idea of pursuing a career in the academic realm become important to me.

The point of this autobiographical tale is that when I began to read ethnography and other kinds of anthropological writings I had a sense that there were often unstated and perhaps inaccurate assumptions about "our" culture which lay at the centre of these works. I was, and most of us are and always will be, in no position to debate the facts presented in ethnographies of foreign cultures. I was not there; the writer was. But I had lived in "our" culture and it seemed that the differences between "us" and other cultures which were either implied or stated explicitly were not always as obvious to me as they were to the author, nor were the similarities. To put it another way, in so far as much anthropological writing is aimed at a specific audience who will, along with the writer, recognize the uniqueness of another people or the ways in which they resemble us, I felt

left out. I did not feel part of the collective readership. I wondered just who the "us" was, never mind who the "them" might be. It was evident to me, albeit only in a vague manner, that the culture of the vast majority of the people at university, and especially those pursuing academic careers, was different from what I was used to. I had, for reasons I am still not sure of, left behind my working-class culture, but had not made the transition into the essentially bourgeois culture of the university. In this sense, I am an outsider and this marginality has generated my interest in the subject of this thesis. I hope that this thesis will contribute to a better appreciation among anthropologists of the complexity of our own culture.

### Practical Steps

I conducted ethnographic research in Thunder Bay, Ontario from June 1984 to August 1986. During this period I also visited the communities of Kenora, Dryden and Fort Frances, all located in Northwestern Ontario.

My research consisted primarily of intensive participant observation with an informal group of working-class men. I also benefited from many discussions with older working-class men, and other relevant individuals such as government officials (municipal, provincial and federal), and members of the local Native community. Library and archival research was carried out at the Public Archives of

Canada (hereafter PAC), Lakehead University and the Thunder Bay Historical Museum. In the thesis I have also drawn upon my own experience as a worker in Thunder Bay.

Except for short family visits, I was away from the city for over 10 years; however, initiating participant observation was relatively easy. Because of my own work experience in Thunder Bay I knew where the working-class bars were. I went to one that I had often attended when I lived and worked there which is still very popular, and met some old friends and work mates. Through these initial contacts I became aware of various informal groups that regularly patronized the bar. During the first summer of my field work, a form of softball was very popular in the city, and the bar frequented by my informants sponsored a league. I started going to some of the games and the weekend tournaments. That winter I played on a boot-hockey<sup>4</sup> team that the informal group formed and the second summer I joined the lob-ball team.

The bulk of my data on the informal group was recorded by writing out detailed descriptions of the events and conversations after they had taken place. I carried a small note pad and pencil all of the time in my shoulder sack and took as many notes during an event as was possible without changing the atmosphere. It is difficult in such a

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<sup>4</sup> Boot hockey is essentially the same as normal ice-hockey except skates are not worn.

situation to try to record what is taking place without making the participants so uncomfortable that conversations or actions cease. For this reason I was unable to use a tape recorder, although I did so during some of the discussions with older men. After approximately six months of field work I attempted more formalized interviews with members of the informal group. I gave up after six attempts because my formalized questions received formalized answers. The process was foreign to the way the men normally communicate with one another. Answers often tended to be one word, yes or no, or extremely non-committal, "I don't know; it all depends how you look at it." This was very different from the conversations, some of which are presented in the thesis, in which more substantial opinions were expressed on a variety of matters. In the context of the informal group, where the men are comfortable, themes of the men's own culture predominated, and conversation flowed more easily. In the one-on-one interview setting there was a lot of hesitancy in The Boys' responses. They were uncomfortable, no longer felt in control, and therefore became uncommunicative.

When I first began to hang around with the group I told them I was working on my Ph.D., which was going to be about regular working men and their attitudes about issues such as women and Natives. After a brief initial period of distance, during which I had to correct some mistaken views



about students -- a couple of the group members were convinced all university students were paid a regular salary by the government, and that student loans did not have to be repaid -- they were generally very positive about having someone interested in them.

But things were not always smooth. With time it became clear that many of their opinions were different from mine, and some of the Boys became rather defensive, or in some contexts aggressive towards me. There were several incidents as well when individuals deliberately expressed very ardent racist opinions about the local Native community to goad me into responding. Overall, however, relations were good and most of the members of the informal group remain my friends. Pity and confusion are, perhaps, the most apt descriptions of their reaction to me. Many of them, once they learned what the financial situation of a graduate student in anthropology was like, could not understand why anyone would want that kind of life. From their perspective I had given up a well-paid and secure job, for a very insecure future. Had I stayed at the grain elevator, I would have had more than 10 years of seniority, a pension plan, and certainly would have been able to buy a house and a car.

My methodology entails a number of limitations. One is the question of how representative my information is of the local male working class, and of the working class in

Western capitalist countries generally. From my own experience and research I think that the themes that emerge in this thesis are applicable to the White male working class in Northwestern Ontario as a whole. Local people who have read parts of the descriptive passages do recognize the phenomena I have written about. In so far as there is a resonance between what is said here and the findings of researchers working on similar topics in other countries, the universality of my analysis is evident.

However, by its very nature, working-class culture is always somewhat of a local culture. For a number of reasons -- money, work schedules, subcultural boundaries -- working-class people are more bound to specific regions than members of the bourgeoisie, who, aside from financial considerations often express their class existence by participating in a more international culture. This dichotomy is by no means absolute, but its effect is evident historically in the fact that many working-class struggles are intimately bound up with community issues.

The major limitation to this thesis is the absence of a female voice. In the culture of The Boys it is not possible for a man to carry out participant observation with women without generating many suspicions and creating problems. It is not "normal" for a man to sit and talk with the women in a public setting. Gender relations are changing, but patriarchal structures and ideology are still strong among

The Boys. Obviously, there is a female domain of activity independent of men, and female opinions and attitudes are not necessarily the same as the men's. This thesis deals only with the male working class and, therefore, presents only half the story.<sup>5</sup>

#### Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One is a discussion of theories about the relationship between class, consciousness and culture among the contemporary working class. I defend the idea that production relations are the most significant, although not absolutely determinant feature, of working-class consciousness, and that the particular meaning other discourses have for the working class is based on their experience in the process of production.

Chapter Two presents a brief outline of the economic, political and demographic features of the region of Northwestern Ontario. It also introduces the central characters of the informal group with whom I conducted the bulk of my participant observation.

Chapter Three is a description and analysis of The Boys' interest in lob-ball. The game serves as a ritual text which illustrates important themes in the way The Boys

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<sup>5</sup> For a presentation of the female voice see Luxton (1980).

construct and express their own identity. I argue that an intense interest in sport and on having fun is itself an inversion of the normal hierarchical relationship between work and play in modern society. In this sense, it can be read as a penetration of the dominant logic in modern capitalist society. Much of the Boys' leisure style mocks notions of self-control, discipline, fitness, and the work ethic, yet it is encapsulated within a hegemonic culture based on consumption and gender.

Chapter Four discusses ethnicity and ethnic prejudice through an examination of the attitudes towards Natives, the largest visible minority in the region. Negative stereotypes about Indians<sup>6</sup> have a long heritage in European culture and the attitudes discussed here reflect this fact. However, local opinions about Indians and the "Indian problem" are inextricably bound up with the role played by commonsense thought, regionalism, and the welfare state in the local White working-class culture. Attitudes about Indians are an example of the influence of racism, but as a symbol Indians and their perceived treatment by the Canadian state connote much more than this. The Boys' statements about Indians are, at one and the same time, statements

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout the thesis the terms Native, Native people, Amerindian, aboriginal people, and indigenous people refer to the actual first inhabitants of the continent. Indian denotes the stereotypes and images of Natives which are part of European and Euro-Canadian culture in the past and present.

about Native people and statements about power relations among Euro-Canadians; they reflect an Indian/White conflict and a "people" versus the "power bloc" conflict.

Chapter Five examines commonsense thought and anti-intellectualism in White male working-class culture. I relate the importance of these inter-connected phenomena to the division between mental and manual labour in contemporary capitalist society. The high validation given to commonsense as a mode of thought is an aspect of the inversion of the mental/manual dichotomy in which the second of these categories is more highly valued. This is an oppositional practice which has the unfortunate effect of blunting the possibility of more theoretical and critical ways of perceiving and thinking about the social world, and because of this popular stereotypes regarding women and Natives, in particular, become deeply entrenched.

## CHAPTER ONE: STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN WORKING-CLASS CULTURE

### 1.1. Introduction

In this chapter I present an overview of different theoretical approaches to the analysis of the relationship between the position of the working class in the relations of production, class consciousness and working-class culture. I examine the classical Marxist position as formulated by Marx and Engels and the way this perspective was developed by a second generation of Marxist theoreticians including Lenin, Lukacs and Gramsci. The last of these writers was the only one to seriously consider culture as an important element in the analysis of the political and ideological development of the Western working class.

A focus on working-class culture is the hallmark of recent analyses by a group of historians and is best exemplified by the work of E.P. Thompson. His writings on the English working class masterfully present the complex cultural processes involved in class formation, and in this way overcome the deterministic aspects of more orthodox paradigms. However, such an approach is marred by a tendency to cultural reductionism which may vitiate the usefulness of class as a concept.

I propose a theoretical perspective which avoids both economism and culturalism by maintaining an analytical

distinction between the economic position of the working class and its cultural expression, and by recognizing the role of non-class discourses and practices in the formation of working-class culture. Thus, working-class culture is not viewed as a mere expression of economic interests, but rather an articulation of various cultural phenomena in an oppositional struggle with the dominant culture which is based upon the bourgeoisie. Lévi-Strauss's concept of the bricoleur and the Gramscian idea of hegemony enable us to understand the possibilities for the creation of new meaning using cultural elements from discourses and practices that are already established, and the limitations inherent in this process. They allow us to discern how working-class "penetrations" (Willis 1977) of the dominant ideology are so often mediated and deflected onto non-class terrain. The position of the working class in the relations of production does not determine the form of these cultural practices, but an appreciation of the dominance of a specific experience of work in the lives of working-class people is crucial to an understanding of the meaning with which these discourses and practices are invested.

#### 1.2. The Classical View of Working-Class Consciousness

The classical view of the working class in Marxist theory originates in works such as the Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels 1968) and The Condition of the English

Working Class (Engels 1969). The historical circumstances in which this paradigm was created left an indelible mark on it. The early texts of Marx and Engels which deal with the working class were written on the basis of their observations of the response of English workers to the new economic, social and political conditions of proletarianization. This encouraged a speculative vision of what was to come, rather than a full understanding of the nature of the working class in a mature capitalist mode of production. The teleological bent of the theory is also a reflection of the domination of evolutionist ideas in the nineteenth century (Johnson 1979:203).

The classical Marxist paradigm is centred on the distinction between class as an economic phenomenon (the class-in-itself) and a class conscious of itself as such (the class-for-itself). The concept of culture is absent. Popular and/or traditional beliefs and practices are at best ignored and at worst treated with disdain; their relationship to political practices and ideologies is not viewed as a concern. An intellectual elitism is evident, for example, in Engels' description of the pre-Chartist culture of small-scale craft workers.

They could rarely read and far more rarely write; went regularly to church, never talked politics, never conspired, never thought, delighted in physical exercises, listened with inherited reverence when the Bible was read, and were, in their unquestioning humility, exceedingly well-disposed towards the "Superior" classes. But, intellectually, they were dead (Engels 1969:39).



For Engels, class consciousness is expressed in the recognition by the class of its true political and economic interests and in the resulting struggle with capital.

As a class-in-itself the proletariat exists solely in its position in the relations of production. It is a passive object brought into being and "thrown hither and thither" by the movements of capital (Johnson 1979:203). This exclusively economic existence gives rise to the self-recognition of the proletariat which constitutes itself as a class-for-itself, conscious of its interests and struggling against capital. The end of this process is the negation of bourgeois society, the triumph of the proletarian revolution.

The teleological nature of this argument is obvious. A necessary and causative relation is drawn between the class and a specific class consciousness. Once the economic position of the labourer is established the transition to a revolutionary working class is preordained. The cause and effect relationship between a place in the relations of production and a specific form of consciousness is the root of the charge that Marxism treats culture as a mere epiphenomenon of the economic base.

Historical developments illuminated these fundamental flaws in the classical theory of the origin of working-class consciousness. The revolutionary working class has not been a major factor in many capitalist countries. In England,

after the initial period of extreme agitation and the early development of what seemed to be potentially revolutionary institutions, the working class settled into a process of coexistence with capital, of attempts to reform it rather than negate it (Nairn 1973:188). Indeed, it has been argued that the more fully capitalism is developed in a given country, the more reformist the working class becomes (Mann 1973).

Much of the subsequent development of Marxist thought has been an attempt to account for the missing revolutionary working class. This was a primary concern for a second generation of Marxist theoreticians. Lenin argued that the development of class consciousness among the working class required strong leadership. Popular sentiments and beliefs were thought to be no basis for appropriate working-class political practice, and spontaneous agitation no substitute for a scientifically-based revolutionary strategy. Only a scientific analysis based in Marxist theory could indicate what the correct course of action would be. Even though Lenin was concerned with practical issues of political mobilization he reduced ideological contents to their class character and insisted upon a strong division between ideology and the scientific analysis of a given situation. For Lenin, Marxism is science (Johnson 1979:207-209).

Given the initial success of the Russian revolution, Lenin's theory of how to generate the correct class

consciousness might seem to have been corroborated by historical fact. Outside of Russia, though, working-class revolution was not on the agenda, and a new theory of working-class consciousness had to be developed to explain the actual consciousness of workers.

This is the problem that Lukacs addresses in History and Class Consciousness (1971). The essence of the capitalist mode of production is seen in "the solution to the riddle of the commodity structure" (Lukacs 1971:83). Commodity fetishism generates the reification of social relations as they appear rather than as they are. Social relations in a capitalist mode of production appear to be embodied in things -- commodities -- which operate under laws of nature, independent of human will, rather than as the product of intentional human practice. Social relations are reduced to relations between things, subject to forces external to human desire. Human beings are subjected to impersonal forces -- the immutable laws of the market -- over which they have no control. The ideological expression of the reification of social relations is the domination of scientific method in the social sciences.

There is something highly problematic in the fact that capitalist society is predisposed to harmonize with the scientific method ... when "science" maintains that the manner in which data immediately present themselves is an adequate foundation of scientific conceptualization and that the actual form of these data is the appropriate starting point for the formation of scientific concepts, it thereby takes its stand simply and dogmatically on the basis of capitalist

society. It uncritically accepts the nature of the object as it is given and the laws of that society as the unalterable foundation of "science" (Lukacs 1971:7).

When scientific knowledge is applied to society it is no more than a bourgeois ideology: "it must think of capitalism as being predestined to eternal survival by the eternal laws of nature and reason" (Lukacs 1971:11).

For Lukacs the functioning of capitalism gives rise to commodity fetishism, however, fundamental world views remain attached to each class. These are not the actual consciousness of the class, rather they are the consciousness which can be ascribed to it on the basis of an understanding of the social totality.

By relating consciousness to the whole of society it becomes possible to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to assess both it and the interests arising from it in their impact on immediate action and on the whole structure of society. That is to say, it would be possible to infer the thoughts and feelings appropriate to their objective situation (Lukacs 1971:51).

The ascribed consciousness of the proletariat is consciousness of itself as a class. This includes the recognition of itself as both the subject and object of history. Marxism is the ideology through which self-recognition is achieved, not because it is scientific -- science is bourgeois ideology -- but because Marxism represents "the viewpoint of the totality" (Lukacs 1971:26). Because the proletariat is the most alienated class in capitalist society it is able to transcend the partial

vision to which the bourgeoisie is necessarily restricted by the nature of its position in the relations of production. Unlike the bourgeoisie, the proletariat is not divided into individuals by the objective conditions of its existence, since production is increasingly socialized, while appropriation remains private. Consciousness of itself as a class is synonymous with the struggles which will negate bourgeois society. "Thus the unity of theory and practice is only the reverse side of the social and historical position of the proletariat, simultaneously subject and object of its own knowledge" (Lukacs 1971:20).

Thus, Lukacs is primarily concerned with what the consciousness of the working class ought to be according to Marxist theory, rather than with the actual thoughts and practices of workers. Actual beliefs are either ignored or are encapsulated in the catch-all notion of false consciousness.

We have, then, two different approaches to the questions of what correct working-class consciousness should be, why it is absent, and how to achieve it. On the one hand, there is Lenin for whom science equals Marxism, and this in the hands of a strong working-class party will triumph over the false beliefs of the mass of working people. On the other hand, there is Lukacs, who believes that Marxism is not science, but an ideology, which however corresponds to the imputed world view of the identical

subject and object of history, namely, the working class. Despite their different views on science both Lenin and Lukacs hold a narrow vision of the political implications and possibilities of "the less overtly political elements of a culture" (Johnson 1979:206). The classical view of working-class consciousness, then, eliminates from analysis that which does not adhere to a predetermined idea of what consciousness should be.

Of the second generation of Marxist theoreticians, Gramsci stands out because of his interest in the role of culture in the formation of social classes. His formulations are inconsistent and incomplete (Anderson 1976), but he recognized the importance of the "'spontaneous philosophy' which is proper to everybody" (Gramsci in Hoare and Smith 1971:323), and the cultural elements in which it is expressed -- language, commonsense, popular religion, beliefs, superstitions and opinions. Awareness and criticism are to be built upon an understanding of popular conceptions of the world.

Gramsci's interest in culture was related to more directly political concerns. He recognized the difference in the way political power was exercised in the states of western and eastern Europe. In the East, the state dominated life to a greater extent than it did in the West. As a consequence, different political strategies were required. In eastern Europe, a "war of manoeuvre" was

possible because by capturing the state through armed insurrection one could dominate the entire society. In western Europe, though, there was more of a balance between the state and civil society.<sup>1</sup> Capturing the state, in this context, is insufficient because the ideology of capitalism has saturated civil society. The state is merely an "outer bulwark." Hence a "war of position" is required during which the cultural and ideological groundwork must be performed for the transformation to socialism. In the states of western Europe the consent of the subordinate classes was far more important than in eastern Europe, hence armed struggle in the absence of the appropriate cultural preparations was doomed to failure (Anderson 1976:6-9).

Gramsci also appreciated the role of culture in the constitution of alliances among subordinate classes. He realized that the hegemony of the working class in an alliance with other classes could not be solely political, but had to involve moral and intellectual factors as well. According to Anderson, Gramsci "stressed more eloquently than any Russian Marxist before 1917 the cultural ascendancy which the hegemony of the proletariat over allied classes must bespeak" (1976:17). In the opinion of Laclau and

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<sup>1</sup> Gramsci was not consistent in his use of this concept (Anderson 1976). It can be understood, however, as a concept which designates an intermediate area between the economy and the state. It is the area of social institutions commonly referred to as private. "It is the sphere of 'private' interests in general" (Hall, Lumley and McLennan 1977:47).

Mouffe, the move from the political to the intellectual and moral plane was a decisive transition. It goes beyond an assertion of class-based identities which are joined politically, and establishes ideology, which for Laclau and Mouffe includes what I refer to as culture, as the terrain on which identity is established.

For whereas political leadership can be grounded upon a conjunctural coincidence of interests in which the participating sectors retain their separate identity, moral and intellectual leadership requires that an ensemble of 'ideas' and 'values' be shared by a number of sectors -- or, to use our own terminology, that certain subject positions traverse a number of class sectors (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:67).

As I discuss below, significant problems arise if one privileges the ideological and cultural in the constitution of identities. For the moment, it suffices to recognize Gramsci's contribution to Marxist theory in generating a greater appreciation of the role of culture.

### 1.3. Working-Class Culture and Consciousness

Gramsci's influence is evident in much recent writing on the working class. The attempt to avoid reductionism and teleology, and to place the actual thoughts and practices of workers at centre stage characterizes the recent concern among social historians with the ethnographic description of working-class culture. E.P. Thompson is the central figure in the development of this perspective.

Thompson's work is based on his understanding of the



concept of class, which, in turn, is rooted in the notion of agency. In explaining the title of his book The Making of the English Working Class (1968) he says: "Making, because it is a study in an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making" (1968:9). Because it is an active process, class can only be analyzed over time. Class "is a historical phenomenon. I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships" (Thompson 1968:9). Class happens because of the common experiences of a group of people whose interests are different from and usually opposed to the interests of another group.

Thompson's vision of the relationship between the economic position of a class and its consciousness can be juxtaposed to that of the classical Marxist view. In Thompson's formulation, there is no determination of the specifics of class consciousness by the economic existence of class, no ascribed consciousness which a class ought to have if it is to be aware of its own interest.

The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born -- or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not. We can see a logic in the

responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predict any law. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way (Thompson 1968:10).

Upon this basis Thompson describes in great detail over some 900 pages the development of the culture of the English working class from 1792 to 1832. The depth of the empirical description is awe-inspiring. However, the book is hampered by the absence of theoretical generalizations regarding the issues which he describes. Explanation is eschewed in favour of empirical description, but in the absence of more general principles there is little one can say about the material presented other than to recount various descriptive passages.

This problem is related to and exacerbated by a tendency to collapse the material/cultural distinction into the cultural. Thompson rejects the base/superstructure distinction upon which economistic Marxism and the classical view of the working class is based.

... I am persuaded that I must abandon that curiously static concept, 'basis' and 'superstructure', which in a dominant Marxist tradition identifies basis with economies and affirms a heuristic priority to economic needs and behaviour over norms and value-systems. We may both assert 'social being determines social consciousness' (an assertion which still calls for scrupulous examination and qualification) while leaving open for common investigation the question as to how far it is meaningful, in any given society, to describe 'social being' independently of the norms, and primary cognitive structures, as well as material need around which existence is organized (1978a:261).

The preferred formulation of the relationship between economic structures and the other elements of a given social formation is taken from Marx's Grundrisse.

In all forms of society it is a determinate production and its relations which assign every other production and its relation their rank and influence. It is a general illumination in which all other colours are plunged and which modifies their specific tonalities. It is a special ether which defines the specific gravity of everything found in it (cited in Thompson 1978a:261).

Rather than a distinction between base and superstructure we have, then, a social totality, every element of which expresses the determinate form of production. But the determinate form of production is also embodied in culturally-determinate norms and ideas.

Anthropologists, including Marxist anthropologists have long insisted upon the impossibility of describing the economy of primitive societies independently of the kinship systems according to which these are structured, and the kinship obligations and reciprocities are as much endorsed and enforced by norms as by needs. But it is equally true that in more advanced societies the same distinctions are invalid.... There is no way in which I find it possible to describe the Puritan or Methodist work discipline as an element of the 'superstructure' and then put work itself in a 'basis' somewhere else (Thompson 1978a:262).

These theoretical insights mark progress over the economic reductionism characteristic of the classic view of the proletariat. However, they entail certain problems, especially with regard to the analysis of working-class culture; namely, how do we define what is specifically working-class culture, if we do not initially identify the class on the basis of its position in the relations of

production?

The subject of much of Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class is not the working class but artisans and petty commodity producers who are in the process of being proletarianized. The radical culture he describes is the culture of people who are in the process of losing the status, prestige and way of life to which they have become accustomed. Their radicalism is rooted in the fact that the norms and values by which these people lived are no longer relevant in the economic conditions which are being established. After the period Thompson describes the political culture of the English working class changed significantly, becoming more reform-oriented rather than revolutionary or even radical (Nairn 1973). The Chartist movement expressed its aims in a language that was not specifically working class. It did not orient its criticism of the system to the nature of production relations but to the nature of political representation in the state and the issue of universal suffrage (Stedman Jones 1983).

The problem becomes one of defining what set of cultural forms and contents represents the real working class. If the class is defined in cultural terms only, it is very difficult to specify what, if anything, is specifically working class about the myriad of cultural forms and practices of the people who occupy the place of the proletariat in the relations of production.

The practical tendency of the culturalist paradigm to collapse class into a cultural formation generates either an overextension of the notion of struggle such that it comes to include all manner of beliefs and practices, or class struggle is eliminated altogether. Leach (1967) proposes a "degenerate culture group view" of class in opposition to both a Marxist view based on class struggle between groups who occupy antagonistic positions in production relations and a Weberian notion of class as rooted in occupational groupings which are not necessarily antagonistic. For Leach the primary feature of a class is that each subculture is endogamous, to a degree, and exists as a cultural group independently of other groups. There is no doubt that cultural traits such as accents, educational backgrounds, clothing styles and so on are important factors in determining an individual's range of marriage partners. These factors do not, however, exist independently of other issues. The question is what common experiences generate a desire for certain people to differentiate themselves from others in these forms. One's place in the relations of production and struggle against those who occupy another antagonistic position in these relations is certainly a basic criterion of differentiation.

An example of the other tendency -- to inflate the notion of class struggle so that it includes almost any thought or action -- is Bryan Palmer's A Culture in Conflict

(1979), a study of skilled workers in Hamilton, Ontario between 1860 and 1914. The political significance of many phenomena which are not explicitly political is revealed. However, included in examples of working-class culture which are supposed to express a consciousness of class are practices which are indicative of racism and sexism rather than class consciousness. The charivari, for example, "was used to expose sexual offenders, cuckolded husbands, wife and husband beaters, unwed mothers, and partners in unnatural marriage, to the collective wrath of the community" (Palmer 1979:63). He does have one example of charivari used against a strike breaker, but otherwise from Palmer's own account it seemed to primarily be a means of enforcing community moral standards. To equate all such action with class-based culture is a gross overextension of the notion of class. The charivari was replaced by whitecapping. The White Caps were "obviously patterned after the Southern vigilante groups attempting to preserve white hegemony in the aftermath of black emancipation" (Palmer 1979:66). In Hamilton the White Caps were apparently related to the White Cross Army, "a movement dedicated to the protection of maidenly virtue and wifely chastity" (Palmer 1979:68). Moreover, one of the causes of the Knights of Labour, a popular labour movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was the exclusion of Chinese labour (Palmer 1979:178-180). It may be that people who are

working class were involved in these activities, but these examples can hardly be used to illustrate how working-class culture is rooted in class struggle. Such actions are racist, and if they are part of the culture of actual workers the reasons for their presence need to be examined. Reference to class alone is insufficient. These practices are examples of how class interests are overdetermined by non-class discourses, or refracted through these discourses and therefore misdirected. In his search for the class politics in less overtly political practices or beliefs Palmer has fallen into a "romantic abasement before every manifestation of 'resistance', however exotic, peripheral, displaced or contained" (Johnson 1979:224; see also Bercuson 1981).

The problems involved in an overly culturalist approach to the working class are especially acute when one turns to the contemporary working class. Not only has the classical culture of the proletariat disappeared, the industrial working class has decreased as a percentage of the whole as previously non-capitalist forms of production have been commoditized. Writers concerned solely with the culture of the working class in Britain, for example, see the disappearance of the local pub, of extended-family dwellings, styles of dress, traditional working-class songs, and so on as indicative of the disappearance of the class. Hoggart (1957) perceived the distinctive working class

disappearing into the drabness of an alien mass-culture which is marketed by appealing to the basest features of working-class culture. Young and Willmott's Family and Kinship in East London (1962) is a variation on this theme. It is a poignant description of the destruction of a working-class community and way of life by the creation of a new housing estate. This approach has the merit of vividly evoking a moment of transition in the existence of the working class, but the class has not disappeared; it has simply changed.

The idea that there is no longer a working class, that everyone is middle class today, follows, in part from placing too much emphasis on cultural definitions of class. In the debate about the embourgeoisement of the working class it was assumed that the growing material affluence of workers meant that cultural values would more closely resemble those of the wealthier classes in society. Ownership of a car, a house, and a colour television was thought to indicate cultural convergence with social classes which had at one time been the privileged owners of luxury goods. But objects do not have a fixed meaning which remains the same in each context. Similar objects in different social contexts can have very different values and meanings (Clarke 1979:242). The basic lesson of structuralist linguistics is that meaning is generated by the relationships between elements in a signifying system,



not by the elements in and of themselves. Thus, while the increased material wealth of the post-war working class and the commodities which working-class individuals can now purchase obviously have important effects on the cultural form in which individuals live their class experience, they by no means necessarily indicate that the working class has merged into the so-called middle class.

#### 1.4. Structure versus Agency

We are faced, then, with a dilemma. On the one hand, there is a theory of class consciousness which is based on a rigorous analysis of the economic position of the class and infers from this what the appropriate class consciousness ought to be. Unfortunately, the actual consciousness of the class has rarely conformed to such theoretical prescriptions.

On the other hand, we have an approach which emphasizes the actual consciousness of workers and attempts to elucidate how class consciousness is expressed in working-class culture. This paradigm avoids the teleology and economic reductionism involved in the classic theory of the proletariat. However, it often results in an overly culturalist view of class, which tends to uncritically read class consciousness and resistance into all manner of thoughts and practices. It also leads to a conundrum regarding the definition of the class. If it is defined

primarily in cultural terms one must first define what cultural phenomena are specifically working class. What criteria can be chosen? And how does one deal with cultural change?

The problem is to find an approach which neither imputes a correct working-class consciousness derived from the objective structures of its position in the relations of production, nor ignores the determinative features of the economic position of the class.

A first step is to rethink the base/superstructure (or infrastructure/superstructure) dichotomy. This is an unfortunate metaphor with its connotation of a top and a bottom, in which the superstructure appears as mere icing on the infrastructural cake. But we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water in our haste to avoid some of the implications of this mode of expression. We need to maintain the possibility of analytical distinctions, without forgetting that life is not experienced in this manner. This is no different than saying that sunlight is actually composed of different wave lengths, even though it is seldom experienced in this way. It is possible to analyze out what the components of our experience are.

Godelier (1978) has attempted to maintain the base/superstructure construct and, at the same time, acknowledge the fact that superstructural phenomena such as kinship, religion and politics are often the basis for

certain social forms of production. His solution is to think of base and superstructure in terms of function rather than institutions or levels of society. Thus, in so far as kinship functions as relations of production it is part of the infrastructure, but this does not mean it is also not superstructural at the same time. "The distinction between infrastructure and superstructure is not a distinction between institutions, but a distinction between different functions within a single institution" (Godelier 1978:764).

Godelier argues that the idéel and material similarly can be separated analytically, but not in actuality.

... all social relations arise and exist simultaneously both in thought and outside of it - that all social relations contain, from the outset, an idéel element which is not an a posteriori reflection of it, but a condition for its emergence and ultimately an essential component. The idéel element exists not only in the form of the content of consciousness, but in the form of all those aspects of social relations that make them relations of signification and make their meaning or meanings manifest (Godelier 1978:766).

A second step is to consider the relationship between human agency and the structures which determine and/or limit the possibilities of intentional action. The notion of human agency is crucial if we are to avoid reductionism and if change is to be explained in other than mechanical terms. However, we must always keep Marx's famous dictum in mind: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under given circumstances directly

encountered and inherited from the past" (Marx 1978:9). Human agency acts within and upon structures which exist independently of the will of individuals, but a denial of intentional human practice inevitably results in a collapse into a static vision of society, or into a view of social, political and cultural change as a simple reflection of non human processes. To say that intentionality is a basis of human action is not to imply that consciously-made decisions necessarily lead to the intended results. But even unintended results, which are the objective structures upon which further acts are performed, are nonetheless the product of intentional human practice. Thus, we have to find a middle ground between absolute freedom and absolute determinism.

The problem with an overly structural theory of consciousness is evident in the Althusserian theory of the relationship between ideology<sup>2</sup> and the subject.

Ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness', even supposing this term to have an unambiguous meaning. It is profoundly unconscious. ... Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts but it is above all as

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<sup>2</sup> In the Althusserian scheme, ideology refers to one of the three instances that compose social existence. It includes both the formalized political discourses and the entire realm of meaning. It thus includes what I call culture. I maintain a distinction between culture and ideology, using the second of these terms only in reference to the explicit and formalized discourses with an explicit political and moral intent.

structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their consciousness (Althusser 1977: 232-233).

This "unconscious" structure permeates society, it is a medium or fabric from which men cannot be extricated, for it is the way we live: "men live their actions in ideology, ... by and through ideology" (Althusser 1977:223).

The ideological instance functions to provide social cohesion. Ideology supplies a representation which is "necessarily imaginary" (Althusser 1977:166). In a general sense this is achieved through the process of interpellation. Ideology presents itself in the form of a "Subject" which "hails" an individual, calls the individual out of the crowd and therewith the individual recognizes him or herself as a "subject" in regard to the "Subject". With this act the individual is subsumed under the "Subject". This then supplies a datum for the mutual recognition of the "subject" and "Subject", the subjects' recognition of each other, and of themselves as individuals. It also establishes order and insures that "all is as it should be" (Althusser 1971:80-81). In other words, this is how subjectivity is created, a subjectivity which accepts the given as natural and immutable. In concrete terms this is accomplished through ideological state apparatuses, the dominant one in contemporary capitalist society being the education system.

Althusser's formulation is an attempt to understand how

social formations reproduce themselves, to explain why the multiplicity of individual actions produces a self-sustaining system. But his theory is too functionalist. If ideology creates "subjects" out of individuals and the state apparatuses which control this process are in the control of the dominant class, then class struggle is ruled out. The process of insertion of subjects into their positions in the relations of production becomes a mechanical function of objective structures. If "subjects" are merely the creation of structures controlled by the dominant class how can they struggle against them? How can they change them? Where do oppositional and alternative ideas, discourses, strategies and practices come from?

Indeed, the ontological status of the structures which impose themselves on individuals is itself a problem in the Althusserian scheme. If they are not a product of human action, if they "precede" human practice, then Althusser's entire theoretical edifice resolves into idealism.

However, if we accept the centrality of human agency in the creation of class consciousness, we must immediately qualify what we mean by the term. It is one thing to consciously decide to mow the lawn and to go and do it. It is something else again to decide to create a new society and realize this end. There is a world of difference between intending to do something and realizing the intention. Moreover, there are always unintended

consequences of intentional actions.

Lévi-Strauss's notion of the "bricoleur" is useful in achieving an understanding of how intentional acts are shaped and limited by structures which already exist. The bricoleur creates new meanings by rearranging elements which already exist: "it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified changes into the signifying and vice versa" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:21). The elements, or tools, available to the bricoleur are always limited. New situations must be handled on the basis of what already exists and this has important consequences.

The elements which the 'bricoleur' collects and uses are 'preconstrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from a language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre (Lévi-Strauss 1966:19).

But this does not prevent new meanings from being created -- meanings which become one of the elements which can be drawn upon and rearranged in another context so as to produce yet other meanings. The contexts change to a certain extent independent of the meanings given to them. Thus, without eliminating the intentional, conscious human subject it is possible to infer real constraints upon his or her freedom of action in the cultural sphere while maintaining an autonomy between the "objective" material situation and the cultural ways in which the experience of this situation is

handled.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of hegemony is very important in this context. It is not closed in the sense ideology is for Althusser. Hegemony is a process which has continually to be renewed and which is continually resisted and altered by the subordinate classes in society. But the ability of the subordinate classes to resist is limited because of inequalities in the means of expression. The working-class cultural bricoleur has to work with materials which are to a large extent given by the dominant class. The range of possible alternative and oppositional meanings is, therefore, constrained (Williams 1977:108-114).<sup>4</sup>

#### 1.5. The Specificity of Culture and Its Relationship to Class Consciousness

I have been arguing that it is possible to analytically identify social classes in terms of their position within the relations of production, but that this does not imply any specific forms with regard to the cultural expression of this material social existence. This does not mean that relationships cannot be established between specific

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of bricolage and subcultural style see Clarke (1976).

<sup>4</sup> "It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture" (Williams 1977:114).



representational forms and specific classes. However, the relationships are not cause and effect. We must not confuse

the general problem of class determination of political and ideological superstructures, and the forms of existence of classes at the level of super structures. To assert class determination of superstructures does not mean establishing the form in which this determination is exercised (Laclau 1979:158).

All cultural and/or ideological<sup>5</sup> elements do not have a specific class affiliation even though classes do have objective interests. The working class does have an objective interest vis-à-vis capital, but it is erroneous to assume that Marxism or any other formalized world view is the necessary or correct form of expression of this interest. It will be expressed in terms of concepts, ideas, morals and ethics which already exist, but which can be reworked so as to be meaningful in a new situation. Often the expression of difference and opposition involves metaphor, and thus allows for the possibility of play between the idea to be signified and the signifier. In certain contexts, therefore, there is a degree of ambiguity in the expression of class experience. With regard to politics, more than one class may employ similar symbols in the expression of its class interest and experience at the same time, making class alliances behind similar symbols possible, even though the symbol does not have exactly the

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<sup>5</sup> Laclau employs Althusserian terminology and thus does not distinguish between culture and ideology.

same meaning for the various classes.

The only way of conceiving the presence of classes at the cultural level is in terms of the form in which class discourses are constructed. The oppositional aspect of class relations has no necessary form of expression. "The class character of an ideological discourse is revealed in what we would call its specific articulating principle" (Laclau 1979:160). Laclau illustrates this through an analysis of populist political discourse. Populism has no class connotation in and of itself. Its class character can be established only by analyzing its specific articulation to other ideological elements in a given context. Nationalism, for example, has been linked to different ideological elements by different classes. In Germany under Bismarck the landed aristocracy linked nationalism to the maintenance of a traditional hierarchical-authoritarian system. In France the bourgeoisie connected nationalism to the growth of the centralized nation-state in their struggle with the particularist interests of feudalism, and employed it as a means of neutralising class conflicts. Mao attacked the bourgeoisie for its betrayal of the nationalist cause and related nationalism to socialism. Thus in each of these examples nationalism does not refer to a clearly-defined essence. Only through analysis can the nature of the differences be established.

Is it that nationalism refers to such diverse contents that it is not possible to find a common

element of meaning in them all? Or rather is it that certain common nuclei of meaning are connotatively linked to diverse ideological-articulatory domains? If the first solution were accepted, we would have to conclude that ideological struggle as such is impossible, since classes can only compete at the ideological level if there exists a common framework of meaning shared by all forces in struggle. It is precisely this background of shared meanings that enables antagonistic discourses to establish their difference. The political discourses of various classes, for example, will consist of antagonistic efforts of articulation in which each class presents itself as the representative of 'the people', of 'the national interest' and so on. If, therefore, the second solution -- which we consider to be the correct answer -- is accepted, it is necessary to conclude that classes exist at the ideological and political level in a process of articulation and not of reduction.

(2) Articulation requires, therefore, the existence of non-class contents -- interpellations and contradictions -- which constitute the raw material on which class ideological practices operate (Laclau 1979:160-161).

We must consider what this means specifically for the analysis of working-class culture. Western Europe, particularly England, is the home of the world's first modern working class. The way of life, the institutions, the beliefs developed by working classes in other parts of the world are, then, implicitly, if not explicitly compared to the classic example.<sup>6</sup> In the analysis of the new working class in the developing regions of the world and the old working class in the so-called post-industrial nations any

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<sup>6</sup> A recent example of this is Davis's (1980) discussion of the American working class. His whole analysis is based on the question of why the American working class did not follow the "normal" path of development.

deviation from the paradigm constituted by the experience of the European working class is seen as evidence of the irrelevance of class in favour of notions such as tradition, tribalism, ethnicity, consumerism, embourgeoisment, and so on. But the practices and ideologies of the contemporary working class, wherever it is, cannot be measured against a European example considered to be paradigmatic. There is no necessary form of working-class ideology, politics or culture.

A more fruitful approach to understanding the relationship between class, consciousness and culture is to analyze the specific ways in which a myriad of elements are combined to have a significant meaning for people who occupy "the poles of antagonistic relations" but who "have no necessary form of existence at the ideological and political levels" (Laclau 1979:159). The fact that in many contexts traditional beliefs and forms of expression are important in ideological and political life cannot be immediately interpreted as the overriding force of "primordial sentiments" or as the domination of the "ideal" over the "material". It is an expression of the fact that people are born into conditions they did not themselves create. These conditions include production relations, and factors of the "superstructure" such as language, beliefs, distinctions between knowledge and non-knowledge.

The forms of these latter phenomena are not determined

by the relations of production; they are the cultural elements through which the relations of production are experienced and in which this experience is expressed.

The scientific study of ideologies presupposes precisely the study of this kind of transformation [i.e. how non-class cultural elements can express class contradictions] -- which consists in a process of articulation and disarticulation of discourses -- and of the ideological terrain which gives them meaning. But this process is unintelligible so long as ideological elements are preassigned to essential paradigms (Laclau 1979:157-158).

#### 1.6. The Possibilities and Limitations of Class Consciousness

Viewing non-class cultural and ideological phenomena as possible vehicles of expression of class interests has allowed social scientists to understand certain phenomena which had previously been relegated to categories such as tribalism. Shivji's (1976) analysis of the way ethnicity symbolized class domination in Tanzania is an outstanding example of this. Ethnicity was the symbolic form in which classes were defined and the class struggle expressed (Rousseau 1978). We can expect that in social formations where non-economic factors play a predominant organizational role, that is where institutions that are superstructural perform functions in the infrastructure, class struggles will be expressed in terms which are not explicitly economic (Saul 1979).

However, non-class discourses have a real autonomy, and

while they may provide a form of expression of class conflict, they may also mask such conflict. There is no way of predicting the actual meaning of these phenomena before the analysis. We must examine how class and non-class discourses intersect. For while an individual is assigned a subject position on the basis of place in the relations of production, he or she also occupies other subject positions on the basis of race, ethnicity, nation, gender, region and so on. Thus, in the case at hand, the subjects are working class; they are also male, White, citizens, taxpayers, Northerners, fans, players, consumers, drivers, and a number of other categories. Each of these subject positions can intersect with class in either negative or positive ways, or in both negative and positive ways. They may further the ability of individuals to perceive the actual conditions of their existence or they may limit it.

Willis (1977) employs the concepts of penetration and limitation to describe the process by which class consciousness is expressed and developed or thwarted.

'Penetration' is meant to designate impulses within a cultural form towards the penetration of the conditions of existence of its members and their position within the social whole but in a way which is not centred, essentialist or individualist. 'Limitation' is meant to designate those blocks, diversions and ideological effects which confuse and impede the full development and expression of these impulses. The rather clumsy but strictly accurate term, 'partial penetration' is meant to designate the interaction of these two terms in a concrete culture.

Penetrations are not only crucially skewed and deprived of their independence, but also bound

back finally to the structure they are uncovering in complex ways by internal and external limitations. There is ultimately a guilty and unrecognised -- precisely a 'partial' -- relationship of these penetrations to that which they seem to be independent from, and see into. It is this specific combination of cultural 'insight' and partiality which gives the mediated strength of personal validation and identity to individual behaviour which leads in the end to entrapment. There really is at some level a rational and potentially developmental basis for outcomes which appear to be completely irrational and regressive. It is, I would argue, only this contradictory, double articulation which allows a class society to exist in liberal and democratic forms: for an unfree condition to be entered freely (Willis 1977:119-120).

The ways in which White working-class men partially penetrate the ideological fog so as to understand their own conditions of existence, and yet are limited by the forms in which their thought is expressed and the non-class ideologies to which this expression is linked, are precisely the subject of this thesis. I argue that certain leisure activities, ethnicity, regionalism and commonsense thought are at one and the same time means of understanding and expressing their class position and yet inherently limit that understanding.

There is a recent debate over the question of whether the working class has an objective interest in penetrating the conditions of its own existence, and ultimately of overthrowing a capitalist system. The argument is primarily concerned with appropriate political strategies for socialists, but it is relevant to the subject of this thesis because it revolves around the relationship between class

and non-class discourses. In the past it was assumed by Marxists that the working class was the only social class with an objective interest in overthrowing capitalist relations of production. As we have seen this was the assumption of the classic view of the proletariat. According to Lukacs, the working class is the only class without a vested interest in believing the dominant ideology. Even the culturalist perspective assumes that the class position provides a common experience upon which the class makes itself, even though it does not predict what form class consciousness should take.

Recent writers (Gorz 1982; Laclau and Mouffe 1985) have argued that given the fragmentation and specialization of labour in contemporary capitalist social formations, and the divisions that exist because of this within the working class, it is a mistake to believe the proletariat has an objective interest vis-à-vis capital simply because of its place in the relations of production. Laclau and Mouffe go further and argue that to assume the proletariat has an objective interest vis-à-vis capital is a form of crude economism:

there is no logical connection whatsoever between positions in the relations of production and the mentality of the producers. The workers' resistance to certain forms of domination will depend upon the position they occupy within the ensemble of social relations, and not only those of production (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:84-85).

According to this interpretation it is through



discourses that subject positions are constituted. Given that an individual is subject to a number of these at once, there is no central identity that can be imputed to social actors: "a fragmentation of positions exists within the social agents themselves, and ... these therefore lack an ultimate rational identity" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:84).

I do not dispute the decentred nature of the subject and in particular the notion that working-class individuals are constituted as subjects in discourses that exist outside of production relations. However, Laclau and Mouffe move too far away from the importance of production relations in the determination of working-class subjectivity. The necessity of work and the fear of losing it dominates the lives of working-class individuals. Even in Western capitalist nations, where the working class, or sections of it, enjoy high wages and some security of employment, their participation in many other subject positions -- as homeowner, consumer, driver, fan -- depends upon their continued participation as wage labourers in a production process over which they have no formal control. The fact that there is a vibrant shopfloor subculture of resistance to management control which does affect the extent to which management is able to determine the nature of the labour process does not prove that the technical and economic demands of the labour process, and production relations generally, do not massively influence working-class

consciousness.<sup>7</sup> It may not necessarily generate a socialist or Marxist ideology, but it is an inescapable fact of life. While it is wrong to impute an entire correct world view to the working class as Lukacs attempted to do, it is reasonable to suggest there are certain ideas and values that must be inherent to the existence of each particular class. As Goldmann (1970:126-127) argues, it is difficult to imagine that a large number of peasants who are small proprietors could ever be in favour of the nationalization

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<sup>7</sup> Part of the Laclau/Mouffe argument is that production should not be viewed as a purely economic phenomenon. Theories such as Braverman's (1974), which argue that the tendency towards deskilling is an economic requirement of capitalism and that it is proletarianizing an ever greater number of workers and therefore generating an ever larger number of alienated individuals who are potentially class conscious (socialist) workers are seen as examples of this economism. Laclau and Mouffe argue that there are not laws of capitalist development which simply unfold; rather, there is a struggle in the production process and the nature of any labour process is a result of this struggle rather than immutable laws of development. I agree with this point, as well as the idea that the workers' place in the production process does not necessarily generate a consciousness that is or resembles Marxist or socialist theory. But it is wrong to suggest that the experience of the production process is not a massive presence in the lives of workers and that it does not have a very heavy influence on the consciousness of working-class individuals. One's position in the production relations is not merely one subject position among many, since many others ultimately depend on it, and others such as sex, ethnicity and race, are reinterpreted in light of the experience of production. Indeed, by relegating production relations to simply one of several subject positions in opposition to those who see it as determinant of consciousness as a whole, Laclau and Mouffe are guilty of what Geras refers to as either/or argumentation. That is arguing either that everything is determined at the economic level, or that nothing is; there is no room for a middle ground. See Geras (1987) and the reply by Laclau and Mouffe (1987). Also, for a critique of Braverman's critics see Sheila Cohen (1987).

of the means of production since this would entail the end of themselves as a class, or that a large percentage of the working class could be against all salary increases so as to stay abreast of rising prices.<sup>8</sup>

Even those subject positions such as ethnicity, race and gender which exist independently of production relations at one level, in the sense that one is born into a gender, ethnic or racial category, are interpreted and redefined in the light of the experience of production. Indeed, these are social categories and are experienced and lived through human practice. For the working class, and perhaps not only for the working class, a large percentage of this practice is in a labour process. Definitions of manliness and femininity are inextricably bound up with work. This is not to argue that work generates gender categories, but that it is impossible to extricate gender definitions from labour processes, unless they are reduced to a strictly biological level. The same argument is true for race and even more so for ethnicity, which by definition is a cultural rather than a biological category.

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<sup>8</sup> Goldmann distinguishes conscience réelle and conscience possible. The former is what people actually think, while the latter is a limiting concept to cover ideas and values which are necessary to the existence of the group itself. The real consciousness may contain many other ideas, but the possible consciousness describes ideas that must be there. In the examples I refer to, he says in their real consciousness many of the peasants may actually want to migrate to the city, but as long as they remain small proprietors they have to believe in private property.

Thus, the penetrations, and limitations to those penetrations, that the working class make of the machinations of the social system in which they live is necessarily related to the experience of the production process. Many non-class discourses are influential, but work is a dominant if not absolutely determinant fact of working-class life. This fact may be difficult to grasp for those whose occupations allow some control over their own schedule. The existential experience of knowing that one's entire life is going to be spent in a job which is not intrinsically interesting or rewarding is not something to be gained by students or researchers who enter working-class occupations temporarily either for money or research purposes. Intellectual understanding of exploitation is not the same as the actual experience. In the chapters that follow I will show how various non-class discourses are meaningful for White working-class men because the way they are lived is intrinsically bound up with the experience of a specific position in the relations of production.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE BOYS

### 2.1. The Regional Setting

T.D.: What makes Thunder Bay different? How is it different from other cities?

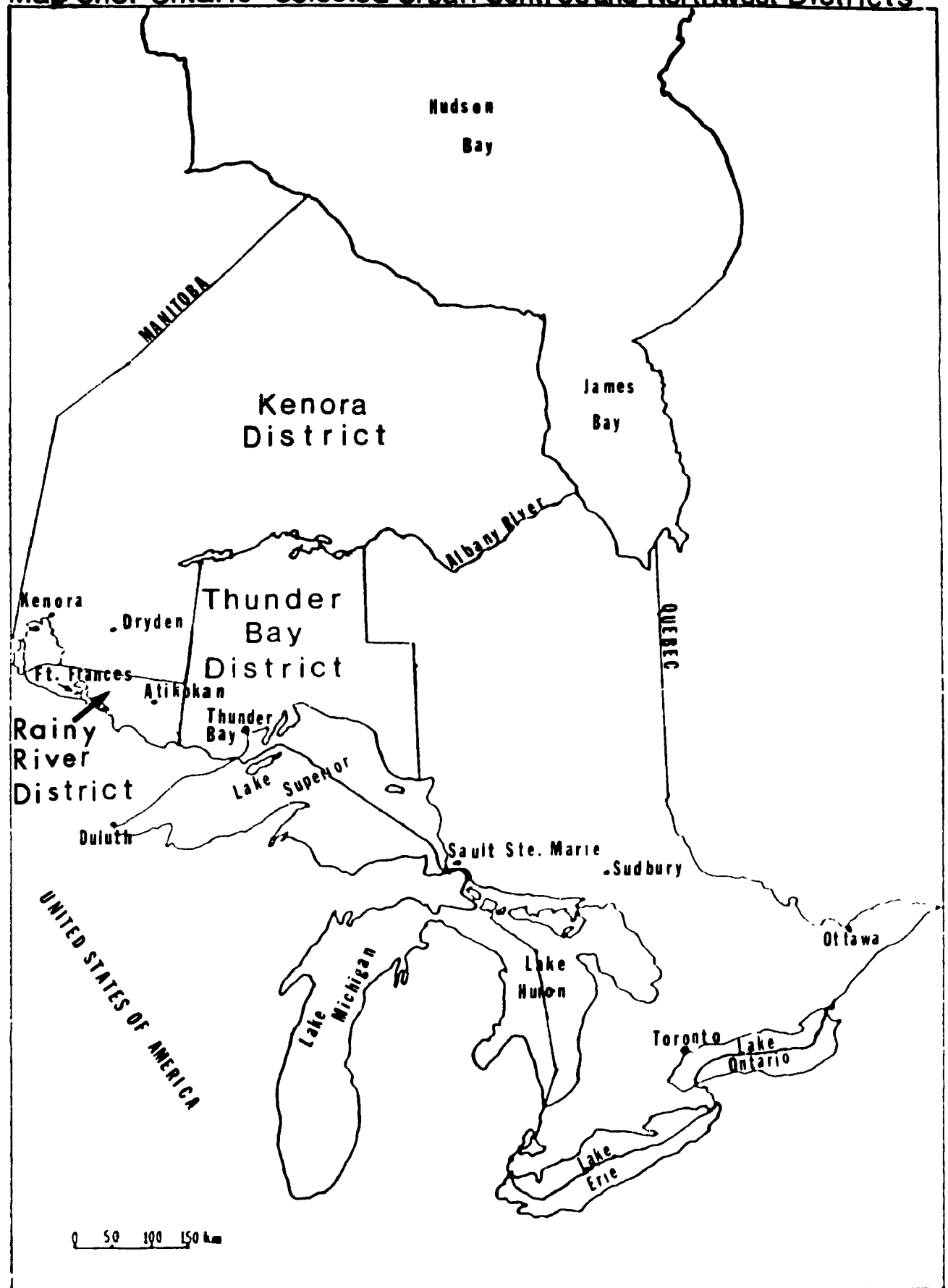
One of The Boys: It's a workin' man's town. Everybody carries a lunch bucket here. That's what it's like in Northwestern Ontario.

Statistically speaking the informant's response is not correct. As in most Western nations today, the largest percentage of the jobs in Thunder Bay is in the service sector of the economy. But the economic and cultural importance of industries based on resource extraction in the city and the region as a whole is reflected in the image of the working man with his metal lunch box. From the perspective of the male working class this is an area where men go to work in work clothes, work boots, and hard hats, and carry a lunch box.

Northern Ontario comprises 90% of the province's land. With the exception of some portions along the southern margins of the Canadian shield, the region is covered by forest, rock, swamp and muskeg. The environment is not suitable for large-scale agriculture.

Northwestern Ontario is composed of the districts of Thunder Bay, Rainy River and Kenora. Compared to the Yukon or the Northwest Territories the area is not very far north, and the city of Thunder Bay which is located in the southern part of the region is not readily distinguishable from many

Map One: Ontario--Selected Urban Centres and Northwest Districts



other mid-sized Canadian cities. But Northwestern Ontario is a hinterland for the southern metropolitan region of Ontario and just as the region is geographically distinct from southern Ontario, so it is economically and socially distinct. These differences are exacerbated by the distance between the South and North. Northwestern Ontario is closer to Winnipeg than Toronto. The Trans-Canada highway along the north shore of Lake Superior which links Northwestern Ontario to the rest of the province was not completely paved until 1965. In many respects the region resembles the West rather than the East. From the perspective of Canada as a whole the region may not seem very far north and it may appear inaccurate to refer to the inhabitants as Northerners, but within the provincial context the distinction between the North and South is significant.

Many Canadians perceive the province of Ontario as the industrial heartland of the nation. This image is perhaps accurate for the southern part of the province. In the North, however, the lack of secondary industry is striking. The regional economy is based on extractive industries such as forestry and mining, on transportation, and on tourism. In terms of the number of people employed the service sector is very important in the local economy, but in terms of the value of the goods produced and wages paid the resource sector is the economic mainstay.

Because of its relatively narrow economic base and its

heavy reliance upon extractive industries, Northwestern Ontario is vulnerable to the boom and bust cycles typical of economies based upon the export of raw materials and semi-finished products. Throughout the 1980s, while the economy of the southern metropolitan region of Ontario was rapidly expanding, the economy of the city of Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario as whole was relatively stagnant. During this period the rate of unemployment in Thunder Bay has been higher than the average for the province of Ontario.

Table One

Unemployment Rates in Thunder Bay and Ontario 1980-1987

<u>Year</u>	<u>Thunder Bay</u>	<u>Ontario</u>
1980	8.0	6.9
1981	6.7	6.6
1982	11.3	9.8
1983	11.4	10.4
1984	9.9	9.1
1985	10.7	7.9
1986	10.7	6.8
1987	8.2	6.1

(Source: Thunder Bay Economic Development Corporation 1988:D-1).

The city of Thunder Bay has the most vibrant economy in Northwestern Ontario. Although there are some exceptions, such as in the vicinity of the Hemlo gold fields, smaller communities in the region are generally experiencing a worsening economic situation. The most deeply affected are



Native communities where unemployment may run as high as 90%, and the social pathologies associated with deplorable economic conditions are taking a heavy toll (Driben 1983; Shkilnyk 1985). The economic disparity between Northwestern Ontario and the southern part of the province contributes to the alienation from the South felt by many residents of the region (Miller 1985, Scott 1975, Weller 1977).

Northwestern Ontario has been a hinterland of the commercial empire based on the St. Lawrence River basin ever since the first French traders who arrived in the region in the latter part of the seventeenth century. There is some disagreement about the distribution of Native people in the area at the time. Archaeologists feel that the present Native occupants of the region, the Cree and Ojibwa, are the ancestors of people who resided in Northwestern Ontario for over 7,000 years (Dawson 1983). Ethnohistorians, on the other hand, are of the opinion that European settlement in the St. Lawrence River Valley, the development of the fur trade and the destruction of Huronia around 1650 had major repercussions on the distribution of Native populations throughout the eastern half of Canada. They feel that the Ojibwa are relatively recent arrivals in Northwestern Ontario, moving into the region in the latter 17th and early 18th century in an attempt to maintain their middleman position in the fur trade, and displacing the Cree to the north and the Assiniboine and Sioux to the west (Bishop

1974; Hickerson 1970). In any event, the fur trade had a serious impact on groups such as the Ojibwa.

The documented history of the Ojibwa shows clearly their interdependent relationship with Europeans. From the seventeenth century on it would not be true to consider them as an aboriginal population. Perhaps because of their strategic location at the Sault rapids on the main western trade route and their early contact with Europeans they became thoroughly identified with the development of European interests (Dunning 1959:4).

The hinterland/metropolis relationship between Northwestern Ontario and more southern centres was established with the initial European penetration into the area. It set the pattern whereby local inhabitants produced raw materials which were shipped out of the region for processing and finished products were imported.

The famous coureurs des bois, Radisson and des Groseilliers, may have reached Thunder Bay as early as 1662. It is certain that Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut, constructed a small fort near the mouth of the Kaministikwia River in 1679 or 1680. This post was repaired by de Noyons in 1688. In 1717 Sieur de la Noue visited the region in his attempt to reach the Pacific Ocean. He built a new post across the river from the old Fort Caministigoyan.<sup>1</sup> La Verendrye wintered on the Kaministikwia in 1731-32, after his men mutinied at the prospect of using a more difficult route along the Pigeon River, approximately 60 kilometres to the south, to get to the interior.

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<sup>1</sup> There are a variety of spellings of Kaministikwia.

When the Northwest Company was formed in 1783, it employed the more southerly route to get to the west and northwest, and established a fort at the mouth of the Pigeon River. The post, named Grand Portage after the nine-mile-long portage with which the canoe route begins, became the inland entrepot of the company. During the summer rendezvous furs from the interior were collected and shipped east, and supplies were distributed to the partners wintering inland. When the boundary dispute between the United States and Britain was finally resolved after the American Revolution, Grand Portage was found to be on American territory and therefore was moved north. The old Kaministiquia River route to the interior was reactivated and a new post was constructed at the river mouth commencing around 1801. In 1807 it was officially named Fort William in honour of William McGillivray, the director of the Northwest Company. For a brief two decades it became a hive of social and economic activity each summer when company personnel from the interior met their eastern associates (Campbell 1980). When the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company merged in 1821, the post and the region of Northwestern Ontario were relegated to secondary status as a source of furs and as a link in the transportation route to the interior. It was cheaper for the company to provision its inland trading posts through Hudson's Bay. The pattern of boom and bust which still characterizes economic life in

the region had begun.

The Native population was the first to experience the effects of this cyclical pattern. Although one must take care not to overestimate the extent of Native dependence on European technology during the fur trade era (Ray 1974), the decline of the fur trade in the region as well as disease and environmental change created a difficult situation for the Ojibwa and Cree in Northwestern Ontario as early as the 19th century (Bishop 1974; Kue Young 1987). In the vicinity of Fort William fur traders frequently reported the Indians were starving and that the land could no longer support them as early as the 1820s.

In 1841, the Ojibwa from the Thunder Bay area petitioned George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, for land in the Kaministiquia River Valley where they could settle and take up farming. He refused on the grounds that a settlement there was not in the interests of the fur trade. Simpson even took steps to encourage retired company personnel who had settled in the valley to move east to Sault Ste. Marie (Williams 1973:25-26). This is one of the earliest examples of the way in which powerful institutions located outside the region were able to determine the future of local residents.

The origins of the contemporary resource-based economy of Northwestern Ontario go back to the late 1840s when the area's potential mineral wealth began to attract the

attention of prospectors. Even though it was two decades before any significant mines were opened, in 1850 the government of Upper Canada negotiated the Robinson-Superior Treaty with the Ojibwa living between Lake Superior and the height of land which forms the border between the Arctic and Great Lakes' watersheds. The region was conceived solely as a source of mineral wealth, and never as an area where there would be extensive White settlement. William Robinson, who negotiated the treaty, wrote to his superior of what he had told the Indians:

... the lands now ceded are notoriously barren and sterile, and will in all probability never be settled except in a few localities by mining companies; whose establishments among the Indians instead of being prejudicial would prove of great benefit as they would afford a market for any thing they may have to sell & bring provisions & stores of all kinds among them at reasonable prices (Robinson n.d.).

In the 1860s silver mining became a major economic force along the north shore of Lake Superior. The most spectacular discovery was on Silver Islet, a tiny rock outcrop one mile offshore from Thunder Cape, the tip of the peninsula that juts into Lake Superior to form Thunder Bay. Only after the Montreal Mining Company sold its interest to an American capitalist was the mine developed. Between 1869 and 1884, when a storm flooded the mine shafts, Silver Islet produced \$3,250,000 worth of silver (Barr 1988; Blue 1896). But the history of Silver Islet also reflects the boom and bust cycle typical of the economy of Northwestern Ontario.

Little of the wealth taken from the mine stayed in the region and the town of Silver Islet that had grown up on the mainland adjacent to the mine died.<sup>2</sup>

Work on the Canadian Pacific Railroad commenced at the Town Plot, now part of the area known as Westfort in the southern half of Thunder Bay, in 1875. The railroad and the development of the port at the head of Lake Superior brought the first sustained economic development to the region. Construction of the eastern link to what was to become Thunder Bay was completed in 1885, but grain had been transhipped from train to boat in the port since 1883. The port remains a vital part of the city's economy. In terms of total tonnage it is the third busiest harbour in Canada, and it is the largest grain handling port in the world (Thunder Bay Economic Development Corporation<sup>3</sup> 1988:H-1). More than 6,000 people, or almost 10% of the city's work force are employed in transportation and storage (Canada 1981).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The historian J.M.S. Careless has aptly remarked "successive opulent suburbs of Toronto spell out a veritable progression of northern mining booms" (in Nelles 1974:118-119). In the case of Silver Islet, however, the owners were based in New York City and Detroit.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter TBEDC.

<sup>4</sup> The national average is 4.8% and the provincial average is 4.0% (Census of Canada 1981). At the time of writing there is serious concern over the future of the port. The drought on the prairies and the federal government's desire to ship more grain out of the west coast are threatening the port. It is projected that as many as

The forest-resource industry, which today is the mainstay of the economy of the entire region, only began to develop in the wake of the wider settlement which followed the construction of the railroad. Initially, it involved the production of lumber for construction, railroad ties and pulp logs. In 1900, however, the Ontario government, under pressure from those with an interest in pulpmills, amended the Timber Act to prevent the export of raw logs. Spruce cut on crown land had to be processed into pulp before it could be exported. American newspaper interests, concerned about the supply of cheap newsprint, lobbied the American government to allow Canadian pulp and paper into the United States tariff-free (Easterbrook and Aitken 1980:538-546; Nelles 1974).

Northwestern Ontario was well supplied with spruce forests. In the then cities of Fort William and Port Arthur four mills, all of them still in existence today, were constructed in the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Since then the importance of the forest industry has grown throughout the region. A report by the Municipal Advisory Committee in 1977 stated that 60% to 70% of Northwestern Ontario's labour force was dependent

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1500 jobs related to the storage and shipment of grain may be lost unless the federal government alters its current policy which favours west-coast ports.

<sup>5</sup> Today there are five pulp and paper mills in Thunder Bay.

upon the forest industry for its livelihood.<sup>6</sup> The industry directly employs over 15,000 people in Northwestern Ontario. Forest sector companies in the city of Thunder Bay employ 6,500 people, about 10% of the total labour force of the city and surrounding area (TBEDC 1988:F-1,F-7-8). Pulp and paper and wood products comprise almost 75% of manufacturing production in Thunder Bay, and pay almost 84% of the total wages in the manufacturing sector (TBEDC 1988:G-1,G-3).

The pulp and paper companies are powerful institutions in Northwestern Ontario. The five mills in Thunder Bay are owned by two companies: four by Abitibi-Price and the other by Great Lakes Forest Products. The latter also owns a mill in Dryden which it purchased from Reed Limited in 1979. Great Lakes Forest Products is owned by Canadian Pacific Investments and Abitibi-Price was bought by Olympia-York Development of Toronto.

In the early 1980s Great Lakes Forest Products utilized its significant influence to stifle criticism of its forest management policies. The Lakehead Social Planning Council (LSPC), an independent organization which attempts to monitor the social effects of economic trends in Thunder Bay and the surrounding region, published a study of the forest industry in Northwestern Ontario which suggested there was an imminent crisis in the forest industry due to a shortage

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<sup>6</sup> Priorities for Action, Quetico Centre, Corporate Study, 1977. It is cited in Lakehead Social Planning Council (1981:1).



of wood. The report attributed the problem to the harvesting techniques employed by the forest companies and the absence of a commitment to reforestation. The LSPC received funding from the United Way, a supposedly independent charitable organization, and the city of Thunder Bay. In response to the report, Great Lakes Forest Products and its employee charity groups, demanded that their donations to the United Way be designated to particular groups, excluding the LSPC. The United Way cooperated with the demand. In 1984 Thunder Bay City Council also criticized LSPC because of the content of its report and reduced its funding. In 1985, the City cut its financial contributions to LSPC altogether. These decisions crippled LSPC, and effectively eliminated an important local source of criticism of the policies and practices of the forest products industry and of the economic situation in the city and region generally. With the election of a new city council in 1986 some funding was restored, but it remains a hotly contested issue for the city council (Chronicle-Journal 1987). In smaller towns where the pulp and paper mills play a proportionally larger economic role, the political influence is greater. Reed Limited, for example, was able to influence local media coverage of the mercury pollution of the English River system by its Dryden mill in the 1970s (Troyer 1977). This is further evidence of the hinterland/metropolis relationship which Northwestern

Ontario is locked into. Large corporations whose principal responsibilities lie with investors who live outside the region determine the economic future of the region and the lives of the local inhabitants.

There has been a very close relationship between big business and the government of Ontario since the 1930s. During the depression an "intimate personal and institutional relationship of government and business" developed such that the interests of the province became virtually indistinguishable from the interests of business (Nelles 1974:487).

Algoma Steel, Great Lakes Paper, McIntyre-Porcupine Gold Mines, General Motors and Ontario Hydro largely determined the course of public policy; in some instances these organizations even wrote the letters and statements that appeared above the Premier's signature (Nelles 1974:487-488).

In Northwestern Ontario, where the narrow economic base enhances the influence of the institutions of government and big business it is difficult to resist their influence.

Weller (1977) has analyzed the political consequences of Northwestern Ontario's status as a subprovincial hinterland. He divides the political response of the local inhabitants into three categories: the politics of extraction, the politics of frustration and the politics of parochialism.

The politics of extraction are characterized by a continual call from the region for a fundamental change in

its hinterland status. This usually revolves around demands for expansion of the economic base of Northwestern Ontario through the establishment of secondary industry in the region and for services that are taken for granted in other areas of the province, such as adequate roads and airport facilities. In terms of electoral politics the tactic of the inhabitants has been to frequently vote for the party in power at both the federal and provincial levels so as not to be left out of anything. The attempt to transform the basic relationship between Northwestern Ontario and the rest of the province through such means has been and will, in Weller's opinion, continue to be futile. The region has only 2.5% of the provincial population, and only five seats in the provincial legislature of 125 seats, and four federal seats out of 264.

The response of the metropolis to local demands has been a "politics of handouts," which takes three basic forms:

The first is the delivery of what are seen by many local residents as bribes. The second is the delivery of essential services as if they were gifts. The third is the appointment of local figures to cabinet posts of relatively little importance (Weller 1977:743).

The politics of frustration is manifested in the strength of radicalism as an undercurrent in the political history of the region, and in fringe movements of various kinds which frequently appear. Radical ideas found a fertile breeding ground in the lumber and mining camps in

the first half of the 20th century. Many of these ideas were brought by immigrants from non-Anglo-Saxon areas of Europe. Finns were especially active in socialist and communist movements. Factionalism and the concerted efforts of government and business in the region muted the effects of the radical current in politics but it is an important feature of local political history.

Few modern Canadian cities, with the exception of Winnipeg, have had a more radical political history during the First World War and Depression years. Equally few, Calgary and Vancouver perhaps excluded, have participated as broadly in the variety of political movements thrown up by the twentieth century (Rasporich, in Weller 1977:747).

Fringe movements have included attempts to establish a separatist party for the region and various environmentally concerned groups.

The politics of parochialism involves both an inward-looking preoccupation with local events and conflicts and an internalization of the inferior status of the region. An example of the preoccupation with local conflicts is the rivalry that existed between Fort William and Port Arthur until their amalgamation in 1970, although even that did not completely end the squabbles. The competition between the two cities was often very petty -- street cars on different timetables, one city on Daylight Saving Time while the other was not -- and it probably delayed some important developments for the two cities and the region. The politics of parochialism is also illustrated by what Weller

calls "the almost pathological interest in local politics" (1977:752). This tendency has been exacerbated by the concentration of local newspapers in the region in the hands of the Thompson chain which is conservative and emphasizes coverage of local "establishment groups".

The politics of parochialism has also involved the development of a dependency mentality in Northwestern Ontario.

For most of its history much of northwestern Ontario has been run as a dependency of either the provincial government or large corporations. Those who ran the towns tended to be members of either a nonresident elite in Toronto or a resident elite which had been imported and was likely to remain only for a very short time. A politics of dependency thus developed with very few of the communities experiencing real self-government and with many residents developing the feeling that only those from outside the region had the requisite skills to govern or offer advice to the North. Thus northwestern Ontario failed to develop self-assurance in many matters which perhaps mirrored the general Canadian lack of assurance on the worth of many aspects of its own endeavours -- until, of course, received favourably elsewhere (Weller 1977:752-53).

There is another aspect of the relationship between the dependent status of Northwestern Ontario and the development or lack of development of self-assurance. In a reactive mode, local knowledge is celebrated to the point where critical self-reflection is ruled out. This is evident in the overwhelming importance local political events have for the residents. It extends well beyond politics in the formal sense of elections, however, and has important effects on thought generally. I discuss this matter in

detail in Chapters Four and Five.

Statistics cannot convey the cultural significance of the resource-based economy in the region. Smoke stacks of the papermills and the smoke which emanates from them dominate the skyline of Thunder Bay and towns such as Dryden, Kenora and Fort Frances. Papermills emit a distinctive odour. On the major roads, trucks loaded with logs are the bane of regular commuters, and rounding a corner on a dirt road only to find yourself head-on with a loaded pulp truck is one of the more frightening experiences one can have. One of my most vivid boyhood memories is of a pulp truck which flipped over when its load shifted in front of my parents' home along the Trans-Canada highway. The driver luckily escaped unhurt.

For many working-class individuals the mills, grain elevators and the railroads represent the best employment possibilities. Wages are considered to be good,<sup>7</sup> the jobs are unionized, and until recently employment seemed secure. When I finished high school in 1973 "everyone" was going to work at The Great Lakes Forest Products mill. Post secondary education was not required to qualify for a job, although a contact in the mill was often a necessity.

The distinctiveness of Northwestern Ontario vis-à-vis the rest of the province is also illustrated by the

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<sup>7</sup> The two years (June 1984 to August 1986) I was in Thunder Bay the hourly wage rates in these types of jobs ranged from \$10 to \$15.

composition of its population. In this respect, the region resembles Western rather than Eastern Canada. According to the federal government census of 1986, Northwestern Ontario had 231,378 inhabitants, a mere 2.5% of the population of Ontario. There is a strong ethnic mixture in the region. After people of British origin (42.5%), the largest ethnic groups are French Canadian (9%), North American Native (8%), Ukrainian (8%), Italian (6%), and Finnish (5%) (LSPC 1980:21). The ethnic distribution is uneven throughout the region. The majority of the population live south of the 50th parallel, which corresponds roughly to the Canadian National Railways line. North of this line the population is primarily Native -- Cree and Ojibwa -- and lives in small scattered communities. Whites, with few exceptions, inhabit the southern part of Northwestern Ontario. There is a large Native population in the southern area as well, but they are significantly outnumbered by Euro-Canadians. European ethnic groups are also unevenly distributed. The Finns, for example, are concentrated in and around the city of Thunder Bay.

More than half the population of Northwestern Ontario lives in or around the city of Thunder Bay, located on the northwest shore of Lake Superior at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River. The city, where the bulk of the ethnographic research for this thesis was carried out, was formed in 1970 when the cities of Port Arthur and Fort

William were amalgamated with the townships of McIntyre and Neebing. Thunder Bay's population numbers 112,272, and almost 10,000 more people live in the adjacent townships and the Fort William Indian reserve which borders the city on the south (Census of Canada 1986).

Northwestern Ontario experienced a population decline in the period 1981-1986 after a decade of strong growth.

Table Two

Population in the Districts of Northwestern Ontario 1971-1986

Year	1986	1981	1976	1971
Kenora	52,349	59,421	57,980	53,230
Rainy River	22,871	22,798	24,768	25,750
Thunder Bay	155,673	153,997	150,647	145,390
Total	230,893	236,216	233,295	224,370

(Source: Canada 1986, 1981, 1976, 1971).

The economic boom experienced in southern Ontario during the 1980s has not been shared by Northwestern Ontario. Between 1981 and 1986 the population of the city of Thunder Bay declined slightly (0.2%), while the surrounding townships grew very slightly (0.2%). During this same period, the population of Canada increased by 4.2%, Ontario by 5.7%, and Toronto by 9.5%. Indeed, all the larger cities in Northern Ontario, both west and east, declined in population between 1981 and 1986: Sudbury 4.6%, North Bay 0.7%, and Sault Ste. Marie 2.7% (TBEDC 1988:C-2).



Smaller urban centres in Northwestern Ontario have also experienced a population decline over the last decade.

**Table Three**

Population in Northwestern Ontario Urban Centres 1976-1986

Year	1986	1981	1976
Atikokan	4,345	4,452	5,803
Fort Frances	8,870	8,906	9,325
Dryden	6,462	6,640	6,799
Kenora	9,621	9,817	10,565
Thunder Bay	112,273	112,486	111,476

(Source: Canada 1986, 1981, 1976).

This reduction reflects the negative economic climate in the region generally. Smaller towns rely heavily on a single industry such as a mine or a papmill. Atikokan was devastated by the closure of the Steep Rock iron mine. Fort Frances, Kenora and Dryden are all heavily dependent on the forest industry, as is Thunder Bay although to a lesser extent. The boom and bust cycle typical of industries such as mining and forest products leaves deep traces in communities in Northwestern Ontario.

While the population of the region as a whole has declined, the Native population has increased rapidly and therefore is of growing importance throughout Northwestern Ontario and in the city of Thunder Bay. Natives form less than 1% of the population of Ontario, but make up about 8%

of the population of Northwestern Ontario. Given that the Native birth rate in 1981 was twice the national average, that the Native population is very young (39% under the age of 15), and that there is a shortage of employment and housing, it is not surprising that large numbers of Native people are moving off the reserve. In 1981, 30% of the registered Indian population lived off-reserve (Siggnel 1986).

According to the federal censuses, between 1971 and 1981 the Native population of the city of Thunder Bay increased from 960 to 2,115 (Canada 1981, 1971). However, these figures may be far too conservative. A survey carried out by the Canadian Native Indian Committee on Alcoholism in 1981 found that in the city of Thunder Bay and surrounding area there were 1,301 status Indians (including the Fort William Band), 2,700 non-status Indians and 9,200 Metis. This totals 13,201 or approximately 10% of the population of the census metropolitan area of Thunder Bay (LSPC 1983:4,7).

There are few data available on the socio economic conditions of Natives living in Thunder Bay. A report prepared by the Native People of Thunder Bay Development Corporation in June 1983 on the employment and related needs of Native women in Thunder Bay gives some insight into the situation of Native women in the city: 61.5% of the women surveyed for the report were single mothers with an average of 2.68 children; 76.9% were unemployed; the source of

income for 63.1% of these women was social assistance; 66.9% had a monthly income of less than \$1,000 a month; and the mean annual income was \$8,902.68, nearly \$9,000 below the National Council of Welfare's poverty line for a family of four.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, what is important is that the White men among whom I did ethnographic research perceive Natives to be poor, often unemployed and highly dependent on welfare. This image is based in part on stereotypes and in part on their experience in the city and region. Attitudes toward Native people in Thunder Bay are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

## 2.2. The Boys -- 1984

The informal group of working-class men with whom much of my ethnographic research was conducted live, then, in a city and region marked by a resource-based economy and a dependent relationship with the southern portion of the province. Regionalism is a theme which pervades The Boys' culture. "Southerners" represent an "other" against which they define their own identity. This is bound up with their class consciousness since the South is perceived to dominate Northwestern Ontario. My description and analysis is not limited to this group, but since they are at the centre of the present work and are typical of young working-class men in Northwestern Ontario, a general description of the Boys

will set the stage for the discussion in the chapters that follow.

In the more than two years I observed and participated with this informal group there were changes of personnel and the life situations of individuals. The composition of the group was profoundly affected by the untimely death of two members. One of The Boys moved out of Thunder Bay because of better job prospects elsewhere, and others slowly became more marginal to the life of the group over time and eventually stopped regularly participating in group activities, while different individuals became more involved.

Activities of the informal group centred on leisure, especially sport and social drinking activities which are intimately bound together. When I first began to participate in group activities it was in the context of a bar which sponsored a lob-ball league in which The Boys had a team. The informal group had seventeen core members that summer, although it must be recognized that the boundaries of the group are fluid and for this reason specifying its size is somewhat of an arbitrary exercise. All of The Boys belonged to social networks that extended beyond the informal group, and there were individuals who "hung around" the group periodically but did not regularly participate. Because the group is informal there is no strict way of defining who is and who is not a member. The seventeen

individuals described below are those who most often participated in the main group activities.

The informal group was composed of four smaller units which I have termed subgroups. A subgroup refers to a network of friends whose relationship is usually deeper and stronger than it is with the other members of the informal group. All the members of the informal group were between 22 and 30 years of age in the summer of 1984.

#### 2.2.a. Occupations

A discussion of the occupations of The Boys illustrates the importance of understanding the specific tasks which comprise a job, and the need to avoid overly general categorizations such as blue-collar or white-collar in classifying workers, as I discussed in the debate about definitions of the working class in Chapter One.

##### Subgroup A:

There were five individuals in subgroup A: a plumber, two civil servants, and two men employed in a hardware and lumber store.

The plumber belonged to the plumbers and pipefitters union local and was not involved in independent contracting. He was hired through the union and paid at an hourly rate. The first summer I was in Thunder Bay he was unemployed, as were almost half the plumbers on the union roll. The second

summer, he worked on the construction of a pipeline located more than 500 kilometers out of the city and therefore only was occasionally able to return to Thunder Bay.

Of the civil servants, one worked for the Board of Grain Commissioners, a federal government body which is responsible for verifying the quantity and quality of grain that Canada sells to foreign buyers. As a grain inspector his job consisted of taking samples of all the grain which enters and leaves the elevator, and checking its type and quality. In practical terms this means climbing in and out of box cars, collecting samples from boats as they are loaded, and at other points in the grain elevator. The job involves shift work, at least when the port is busy in summer months, an hourly wage, and has no specific educational requirements other than the ability to read and write. Despite the designation "civil servant", the job has little in common with the office work generally associated with the term. It more closely resembles what is often referred to as blue-collar work and is located within the grain elevators, an environment infamous for its dirt, dust and vermin.

The other civil servant was employed by Canada Customs. His work was more clerical in nature, and involved cleaner surroundings, but also included shift work and an hourly wage. Shift work is physically demanding because of the continuous disruption of normal patterns of sleeping and

eating, and is very difficult on a family because of the awkward hours. Shift work is often based on a seven-day cycle which does not necessarily correspond to a regular work week and weekend. Thus, normal social activities are interrupted. The bulk of the customs officer's work involved checking vehicles as they crossed the Canadian border approximately 60 kilometres south of Thunder Bay and completing the necessary paperwork. This individual has a diploma from the local community college for a two-year course in law and security, although this was not considered a specific requirement for the job.

The other two members of subgroup A were labourers in a hardware and lumber store. According to the classifications used in the federal census they were employed in retail, but again it is important to understand what the jobs actually consist of because the term "retail" frequently connotes an image which is at odds with what people employed in that category actually do. In this case, both men worked in the lumber section of the store filling customer orders. This entailed helping customers select appropriate pieces of lumber, loading customer's vehicles, cutting wood to appropriate sizes, doing inventory, unloading supplies of lumber delivered by transport truck, cleaning up and so on. They also moonlighted as carpenters, often for the store's customers, although this had to be done on the sly since they were competing with the store for this work. Wages in

the lumber store were poor, not far above the hourly minimum wage, which at the time was \$4.50, and there were no benefits such as life insurance or a pension plan. There was no special educational requirement for this work.

The members of subgroup A were longterm friends who had met at elementary or high school. The two individuals who worked at the lumber store were friends before they began these jobs. Indeed, one of them helped the other get hired.

#### Subgroup B:

Subgroup B was also composed of longterm friends. Whereas the members of subgroup A, with one exception had grown up in the Fort William half of Thunder Bay those in subgroup B came from what had been Port Arthur. In 1984 there were six individuals in this subgroup, four of whom were very active in the informal group and two others who were more marginal. With regard to occupation this group included: a labourer at a paper mill, a waiter, a warehouse worker, and an engineering student at the community college. The two more marginal members of this subgroup were both university students, one studying at McGill in Montreal who only returned to Thunder Bay in the summer, and the other from the local university. The last two individuals did not frequently participate with the group in 1984 and were no longer part of it by the following summer.



### Subgroup C:

Subgroup C was composed of three close friends. Two were skilled tradesmen, an electrician and a sheet metal worker. Like the plumber in subgroup A, they were not in private business, but were members of their respective local trade unions and were hired through the union. As with the plumber, both were unemployed much of the first summer I was in Thunder Bay. What employment there was took them out of the city to work on large projects such as a pipeline, a thermal generating plant for Ontario Hydro, or upgrading a paper mill in the region. The third member of this subgroup was a labourer at a local paper mill.

The electrician grew up and went to school with the plumber and custom's officer of subgroup A. Even though these individuals were not always close friends, the childhood connections were an important factor in facilitating membership in the informal group.

### Additional Informal Group Members:

There were three other members of the informal group in 1984 who were not central to any of the three subgroups but who were part of the group nonetheless. Two were brothers of the plumber. One of them was a labourer at a local paper mill, but was not yet a full-time permanent employee. He was "on-call", a status which meant that he was called in whenever they needed someone. He was not yet part of the

union, and rarely knew from one shift to the next when or if he would be called in, or where in the mill he might be placed. The other brother was unemployed. The third person was trying to start a career as a photographer. He had recently returned to Thunder Bay after living in Edmonton for a number of years, where he was employed for the city's Parks Department as a tree pruner. He had completed a two-year diploma course in photography at a community college in Edmonton. He had grown up across the road from the custom's officer.

#### 2.2.b. Income

The Boys' incomes varied. Those who worked at the hardware and lumber store earned approximately \$5.00 an hour, but as indicated earlier supplemented their income by doing carpentry work on the side. The warehouse worker earned about \$6.00 an hour. The hourly rate for unionized workers with the company was about \$10.00, but he was not yet in the union because he was considered "temporary." The hourly rate of pay for all of the other individuals in the informal group who were employed varied between about \$10.00 an hour for the unskilled labourers to \$20.00 an hour for the skilled tradesmen, although the latter were often unemployed and subsequently collected unemployment insurance a good part of the time I was in Thunder Bay. The yearly incomes of the group varied between \$8,000 and \$30,000. The

skilled tradesmen had a potential earning power much greater than \$30,000, but their sporadic employment pattern meant the potential was not realized. Moreover, when they were employed out of the city they usually had to provide their own housing and transportation. For those with apartments or houses in the city this added considerably to their cost of living. In Thunder Bay, the high hourly pay rates of skilled tradesmen do not necessarily translate into a high yearly income, or a higher than average amount of disposable income after essential living costs are covered. The popular myth of the overpaid and lazy tradesman is belied when the total situation is taken into account.

Income differentials can be divisive factors within the working class. Among The Boys, these differences had not yet generated divisions, although over time one can assume that they will. Home-ownership, for example, is clearly more difficult if not impossible for those at the lower end of the income scale, and there is less disposable income which can be expended on leisure activities and non essential items.

While the differences in income are important and may lead to variations in material wealth among The Boys, they are not enough to generate differences of a class nature. Those who earn higher wages may come to own a house, take more expensive vacations, and drive a fancier car or truck than the others, but their incomes do not enable them to

make the transition from wage labourer to investor and capitalist. Homes and automobiles are purchased with borrowed money; they are an item of consumption, rather than a profit-making investment. There is a popular bumper sticker which reads "I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go." It is a nice summary of their attitude towards wage labour. Many of the working-class individuals I know continually express a desire to "be their own boss", to have a job where they "don't have to take shit from anyone". Few ever achieve this goal. Despite differences in income they remain dependent on a wage and a job over which they exercise little control. For The Boys this basic similarity overrides the divisions based on industry, levels of skill, and income.

The Boys' attitudes towards wage labour are very important because wage labour dominates their lives in terms of the time devoted to it, and because their status as labourers colours the way they perceive others. Work is regarded as a necessary evil. It is not thought of as a career which should be inherently interesting and personally satisfying. The Boys do not expect their jobs to be enjoyable. A "good job" is a job that pays reasonably well, that is secure, and that is not too physically demanding. They do not expect to advance up a corporate ladder into a management position, and few seem to want to. The management personnel they interact with rarely inspire them

in this direction because they are generally perceived as incompetent and unfriendly.

Wage labour is seen as a sacrifice by The Boys. Their dislike of both the rich and poor who do not work reflects their own sense of sacrifice; it is not an expression of a commitment to the work ethic, or a belief in the virtue of work. They have had to sacrifice, to make the adjustment required to hold on to a job, and it is only fair in their opinion that everyone should. I will discuss The Boys' perceptions of and attitudes towards Natives in Chapter Four. It is worth noting at this point, though, that arguments which explain Native socio-economic problems in cultural terms, that is to say that Natives have a cultural heritage that makes it difficult to succeed in the White world which is based on different cultural values, are not accepted by The Boys. As one of them explained to me when I offered such an explanation of Native poverty in the region.

That is just bullshit as far as I'm concerned. No one wants to work. Nobody's culture -- whatever that is -- makes you want to go stand beside the barking drum<sup>8</sup> at Great Lakes at midnight on a Friday night. Some poor sucker has to do it. Indians don't like work. I don't blame them, nobody does, but somebody has to do it.

Male pride is very much bound up with the idea of sacrifice. Their feeling of self-worth does not stem from pride in their skill as much as from the sense that they have made

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<sup>8</sup> The barking drum is a large machine that removes the barks from logs.

the sacrifice, they have "held down a job," they have persisted at something many others "can't handle."

#### 4.2.C. Politics

The Boys' basic attitude towards the formal political system is a mixture of apathy and cynicism. Politicians are generally regarded as untrustworthy, selfish, and willing to say whatever is necessary to get elected. Moreover, the electoral process is viewed as ineffectual since no matter who is elected little seems to change. The dependent status of Northwestern Ontario in the province exacerbates this widespread feeling. The region has too few people and too few seats in the provincial and federal legislatures to make any difference.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) was the only party for which support was ever expressed, although the NDP candidates at both the federal and provincial levels in the riding where the informal group's activities took place were not popular with The Boys. Both of candidates had been active in the NDP for a long time, but neither had made their mark outside politics and neither were working class.<sup>9</sup>

An aspect of the politics of parochialism of which Weller (1977) writes is the importance of populism, which in Thunder Bay is rooted in a person's non-political life.

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<sup>9</sup> While I was in Thunder Bay the NDP won the federal seat, but lost to the Conservatives in the provincial election.

Political ideology is less important than a perception that a political candidate is capable of succeeding outside the political field. While I was in Thunder Bay, one of the most popular politicians ran for the provincial Conservative party. He had been a liquor salesman and a hockey coach locally, and had been active in municipal politics prior to moving into the provincial arena. As a member of the provincial parliament he was highly regarded locally because he worked hard to help local people with specific problems such as getting liquor licenses for weddings and he never forgot to acknowledge events such as Fiftieth wedding anniversaries. He was popular in both the working-class and more affluent sections of the Fort William side of Thunder Bay and everyone I know was firmly convinced that he would be elected regardless of the political party he ran for. Given the lack of political influence the region's elected politicians seem to have on any large issues, local people respond by choosing candidates because of their reputation with regard to the smaller matters of everyday life.

The Boys consider politics to be a boring subject. This does not mean they do not have political opinions on all kinds of issues. But these opinions are expressed in short sarcastic comments or by "bitching" as they referred to it themselves. Long political debates do not interest them, and anyone who enjoys that kind of interaction is bound to be unpopular. The Boys' overall cynicism about politics

"it doesn't make any difference who you vote for because they're all going to do the same thing anyway" -- means they do not engage in explicitly political activities, a phenomenon which summarizes their basic attitude towards the current political system. Since the political system is unresponsive to their wants and demands, politics is considered a waste of time.

Eight of The Boys were in unions, and two others had jobs that were unionized but they had not yet been able to put in the time required to become a union member. One of the two employed by the hardware store was trying to organize his fellow employees. While the overall attitude toward unions was positive, especially since unionized jobs generally had higher wages and better benefits, there was not a high level of union involvement. Because membership is automatic for those who belong to unions and membership dues are deducted directly from paycheques, belonging to the union does not require a high level of politicization or knowledge of the workers' movement. Union dues are one more deduction from the paycheque along with income tax, unemployment insurance contributions and charitable donations. Ironically, the very success of the union movement in some industries, especially the achievement of a system in which union dues are deducted automatically seems to have lessened the level of union consciousness. Indeed, at one level the union is just one more bureaucracy The Boys



must deal with.

The tradesmen in the informal group had a somewhat different attitude toward unions than the others. The craft unions control access to jobs. When tradesmen are unemployed they regularly visit the union hall to find out where they stand on the union roll. There is, therefore, a stronger awareness of what the union actually does, although it tends to be restricted to narrow economic interests such as hiring. There was no indication the union was conceived of as a political instrument or that it should be involved in broader social issues and political issues.

As I have said, one of The Boys was involved in an attempt to organize the employees of the hardware and lumber store. Again, however, the goal of organization was perceived in narrowly economic terms. Unionization was seen as a vehicle to improve the salaries and benefits of the store's employees. The Boys' general attitude towards politics colours their attitude towards unions. They are important in so far as they can deliver economic benefits but there is no conception that broader issues should be union concerns.

The Boys are not aware of the labour history of Thunder Bay, except for what they have heard from their grandparents or parents of the "times of trouble" in the past. They believe that things are better for working people than they were in their parents' and grandparents' youth. One evening

I was talking about a series of violent clashes between police and strikers in the Coal Docks section of Thunder Bay prior to the first world war. I was informed that I was "starting to sound like a communist." Aside from their suspicions about communists, the subject had an aura of being too close to serious politics for their liking.

#### 2.2.d. Housing

In 1984 five of The Boys lived with their girlfriends in rented apartments. Another one lived with his girlfriend at his parents' home. He was divorced from his first wife, who had custody of their child. Two others shared apartments with male friends. The others still lived with their parents. As discussed below this situation changed over time.

The size and shape of houses and apartments obviously was determined to a large extent by need and income. Individual housing situations therefore varied. There is, however, an interesting pattern to the way the interior of the dwellings is organized. This pattern may not be specific to the working class but it varies in an important way from the homes of academics I know.

The Boys' homes and literally every home I visited in Thunder Bay, whether rented apartments or privately-owned houses, are organized around a living room which is in turn organized around a television set and stereo system. This

was expressed nicely by someone (not one of The Boys discussed here) who helped me move into my own apartment. The first thing one must decide is where the television is going to be, then one can decide where everything else will go, I was told. There is no provision for a reading or writing room, nor is the furniture organized so as to facilitate conversation. In the living room everything is oriented toward the typically large colour television and stereo system. Moreover, the television is on virtually all of the time. I will discuss this further in Chapter Three where certain leisure activities are described and analyzed.

#### 2.2.e. Relationships

All but two of The Boys had girlfriends during the time of my research, although two of them had a series of affairs rather than a single steady relationship. This situation also changed while I was in Thunder Bay.

#### 2.2.f. Automobiles

Transportation is a problem in Thunder Bay and the region of Northwestern Ontario as a whole. Public transportation in the city is poorly organized and considered by The Boys to be inefficient and slow, and thus not an option for getting to work or leisure activities. Private transportation is therefore a necessity. One of the first things young men purchase when they leave school and

begin work is an automobile of some kind. Indeed, one of the attractions of leaving school and taking a job is the prospect of being able to purchase a vehicle and thereby gain some independence. Of course, for most working-class people automobiles are bought with borrowed money, so that the mobility which is gained involves a commitment to a job so as to be able to make regular payments on the loan. The purchase of a vehicle is often the first step in the cycle which binds one into dependence on a regular paycheque. In the absence of a decent public transit system, automobiles are essential for many jobs -- hence a vicious circle where purchase of a vehicle leads to dependence on wage labour which in turn requires possession of a vehicle.

Of course, automobiles are a means of cultural expression as well as a means of transportation. Knowledge about cars and trucks is an aspect of masculine identity. The Boys discuss cars and trucks regularly. They can identify a wide variety of models and many are do-it-yourself mechanics. The care of automobiles is always seen as a male responsibility. Women are assumed to be incapable of learning basic automobile maintenance and are subject to the common stereotype of the incompetent "woman driver."

One is struck by the large number of trucks in Northwestern Ontario -- half-ton pickups, vans, four-wheel drives. There is a practical side to the popularity of trucks as personal vehicles given the poor condition of the

roads and the relatively long and cold winters. On the other hand, they are more expensive to purchase than cars and more expensive to operate because they use more fuel, and high gasoline prices are an irksome fact of life in the region. Trucks are also expressions of the high value placed on power and toughness and the importance of physical labour in the local culture. Trucks are "working vehicles" as well as a means of private transportation.

Seven of The Boys drove half-ton pickup trucks. Two of these seven had other vehicles as well. One owned a Chevrolet Corvette which he had rebuilt and which he took painstaking care of. Indeed, his relationship with the "vette" was the subject of frequent humorous insults. He was said to be more interested in the car than in women. The other had a World-War-II vintage, black Harley-Davidson motorcycle which he told everyone had seen action in the war, and even sported bullet holes which he liked to show off. One of The Boys owned a Trans-Am. Like the Corvette, a Trans-Am is a "muscle car", and another expression of the appreciation of power. The motors, transmissions and tires on these vehicles far exceed the requirements of normal street driving. Many of The Boys frequently expressed a desire to own such a vehicle. The other members of the informal group drove a variety of cars. Two owned foreign (Japanese) models.

## 2.2.9. Clothing

Clothing styles vary with individuals to some extent, of course, but Thunder Bay overall is characterized by casual dress, except for special occasions. Casual dress is defined here as T-shirts, blue jeans, baseball caps, and windbreaker jackets (often with a team or company insignia on them). This was certainly the dominant style for The Boys and they were very aware of it. One of the ways people from "down East" were recognized was by the different style of their apparel. I was once told that one of the reasons people from "down East" were not liked is that they "dress up" all of the time and in doing so make local people feel uncomfortable. Dressing up was seen as a way of "putting on the dog", of showing off, although not dressing appropriately for certain occasions such as weddings and banquets was also seen as improper and an indication of a lack of respect for the event and the people for whom it was held. A new roadhouse-style bar/restaurant in the city, modelled after those in larger cities in southern Ontario, posted the following sign at the door: "No baseball uniforms, denim jackets, workboots, baseball caps or bush jackets". A couple of The Boys told me they had gone there but felt uncomfortable. "You can't relax," one of them said. In its concern to present a certain urban and "sophisticated" image, the bar's dress code excluded The Boys and many other "average" working people in Thunder Bay.

Attitudes about clothing illustrate another facet of The Boys' culture -- conformism. This extends to all things. They have a powerful sense of what is "normal," and define it in relatively narrow terms. Clothes, hairstyles, food, drink, home furnishings -- all are subject to scrutiny and comment. Gossip about such issues is a basic feature of interaction and a means of enforcing the informal code. Nobody wants to be "talked about"; nobody wants to stand out in the crowd; nobody wants to be considered "strange."

#### 2.2.h. Personal Style

Northwestern Ontario is a place of long, empty distances, of big machinery, large trucks, rail cars, and lake ships. Size, power, stamina -- all are important aspects of the way The Boys define themselves in opposition to perceived others. This is evident in their personal style.

Obviously there are individual differences, but one discerns a set of themes around which personal style revolves for The Boys. The ideal man in this world is someone who is physically strong and coordinated, is skillful at practical tasks (a handyman), who "holds down a job" without complaining, and who is modest.

These ideals reflect the nature of the economy and the history of the working class in the region, and the enduring legacy of frontier mythology. The first working-class

individuals in the region were miners, lumberjacks and labourers on projects like the railroad. The work was physically demanding and involved many skills which modern industrial labour processes have eliminated. The possession of practical skills is also important because it lessens reliance upon the market and contributes to self-reliance.

The strong silent character of Hollywood Western films is an ideal for The Boys. They are very reserved, sometimes to the point of appearing unfriendly. During initial contact they do not make efforts to introduce themselves to strangers or to include them in conversation. I remember my first week of work in the woodroom of a paper mill in 1973. In the lunch room no one spoke to me directly. The informal group continued chatting among themselves and playing crib, their favorite card game. Aside from an abrupt nod of the head which is their way of saying hello to strangers, there was no effort to acknowledge my presence. Only after an oversized log jammed the wood chipper I was stationed at and shut down the whole line, including the barking drum and the de-icer<sup>10</sup>, and it took several of us almost an hour to remove the jammed log did they start to talk to me. But once one is part of the group one learns that silence is not unfriendliness. Within the group there is a free flowing commentary, a lot of which is based on friendly insults and

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<sup>10</sup> The de-icer removed the ice and snow from the logs in the winter.



jokes.

However, this is a culture where the emphasis is on action rather than verbalization. The Boys are doers, not talkers. One does things for family and friends; one does not talk about it.

The Boys place a very high value on the maintenance of expressive control. Their personal style is the opposite of the explosive emotionality Belmonte (1979) describes for the poor of Naples. It can also be juxtaposed to another image, very popular in the 1980s: the smart-talking "witty" young professional or businessman. "Big talkers" are the object of scorn. The Boys are stoics; one accepts fate uncomplainingly, if not cheerfully.

Emotional control is one of the ways in which men and women are differentiated. Women are expected to be emotional, while men are supposed to maintain control. Men who are visibly too emotional or expressive are likely to have their sexual preferences questioned -- it is a sign of homosexuality.

### 2.3. Changes

The informal group continuously evolved during the period of my research. But while the personnel changed, the informal group as a structure persisted. Those who were no longer actively involved with The Boys became more involved in another informal group. With the exception of the two

university students (see below) they frequented the same bar and continued to be thought of as friends.

By the summer of 1985, four of the individuals who were previously part of the informal group no longer participated in the group's activities. The two brothers of the plumber became less and less involved during the summer of 1985 and were very marginal by the end of that summer. The two university students did not get involved with the team at all. The rupture came the preceding fall when two members of subgroup B went to Montreal to visit their friend who was attending university. According to them, they had been invited for a visit but when they arrived their friend had no time for them. He was busy with his Montreal friends, and in particular a girlfriend. They did not feel comfortable with this group of people.

Other changes came as a result of two tragedies. In early June 1985, one of the members of subgroup A died suddenly after a brief illness. In September, the photographer was in a car accident and he died after spending nearly a month in a coma.

But other individuals became part of the group. Another papermill worker and an older man in his 40s joined the team. The mill worker had played for another team in the lob-ball league and was a regular at the bar. Since all the informal groups that frequent the bar involve overlapping friendships it is not unusual for someone to

slowly move away from one informal group and into another. The older man was manager of a local trucking firm. He was a friend of someone who also worked at the hardware and lumber store and through this connection he became part of the group. Both of these individuals were married and had children. The latter owned his own house, while the former lived in an apartment.

Of course, I was also a new member of the group. During the winter of 1984-85 the group had a boot hockey team. I played on this team over the winter, and in the summer of 1985 I joined the baseball team.

By the summer of 1986 there were further changes. I did not play lob-ball that summer and was slowly becoming less involved with the group as I prepared to return to Montreal. The plumber was employed out of town most of that year and so did not participate as much. The electrician and the sheet metal worker became more marginal to the group, partly because their employment took them out of the city, and partly because the electrician became seriously involved in a new love relationship. The sheet metal worker and the electrician were close friends and as one became less involved so did the other. Also, the other member of the informal group who worked at the hardware store quit his job and moved to another city. This happened rather suddenly. He went on a week-long drinking binge, during which time he did not go to work or call in to book time

off. At the end of the week he quit his job and almost immediately left for a city in southern Ontario where he had a cousin. He found a job there in a furniture factory. He had earlier broken off his relationship with his live-in girlfriend.

There were three new faces in the group that summer. One worked for the provincial Ministry of Lands and Forests as a forest-fire fighter. He had worked at the grain elevator when I had worked there in the 1970s, and it was partly through me and partly because he was a regular at the bar that he became connected to the team. He was 30 years old at the time, married and owned his own house. He drove a small half-ton van. Because of my decreased involvement in the group, I never came to know the other new group members very well.

#### 4. Further Changes

The group continued to evolve. The years between the age of 18 and 30 are years of transition. The Boys for the most part had yet to establish homes. Although several of them lived with girlfriends, and this was not considered unusual or sinful, marriage is still thought of as the norm, especially if children are involved. It is considered inappropriate for a child to be born out of wedlock. Marriage is thought to cement a relationship, and provide the stability necessary for a child's upbringing. Seven of

The Boys are now married, although the two married men who joined the group in 1985 have since been divorced.

Thunder Bay has one of the highest incidences of private home ownership in the nation (69.3%) (TBEDC 1985:Q-3). It is considered normal for a family to own its own home. By 1988, six of the 1985 group owned houses and seven of them (including six homeowners) had children.

## 2.5. Religion

Religion plays little role in the normal day-to-day activities of The Boys. It is rarely discussed, none of The Boys regularly attended church, and there was little concern with official church doctrines, especially with regard to premarital sex. However, The Boys still have a belief that in some matters religion is important.

Large church weddings are popular in Thunder Bay. Even couples who have lived together for years have large church weddings. It is considered unusual if a couple does not have such a wedding. As I have already said, even though cohabitation outside of wedlock is very common, there is still a sense that marriage is the proper thing to do, especially if a child is expected.

Christening children is also considered the normal and proper thing to do whether or not the parents ever attend church. My own daughter was born when I was in Thunder Bay and our decision not to have her christened was considered

strange and even irresponsible. One of The Boys said to me, "What if something happens to her?"

Religion continues, then, to exert some influence over The Boys' behaviour, but it is definitely part of the culture of the mediocre (Halle 1984:251-291). It is not something The Boys are passionate about and is not something they are committed to in the sense of regular church attendance or adherence to a religiously inspired lifestyle. There is a sense, though, that there must be some kind of ultimate reason for their own existence and there is no point in playing with fate. Therefore they do the minimum to guarantee their children's spiritual and material well-being.

### 3.6. Conclusion

This brief introduction to the region and The Boys illustrates several important points. The region is a hinterland of the southern metropolis, and is heavily dependant upon resource-based industries. The natural environment is an important aspect of life both economically and culturally and is expressed in the way "city people" from "down East" are viewed. This attitude, as expressed by The Boys, will be further discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

The importance of forestry, mining and transportation in the regional economy colours the economic and cultural

life of Northwestern Ontario and the city of Thunder Bay. Again, as will be elaborated in later chapters, notions of toughness and power are related to the nature of the economy. As important aspects of The Boys' cultural world they are reflected in the large trucks, ships, trains and heavy equipment that are always visible. Not everyone works with such equipment but it clearly marks the local inhabitants' self-image.

The Boys represent a specific example of an informal group of young working-class men. The informal group is a persistent structure in their life, although the individuals in it frequently change. The general features of the group described above are typical of the many informal groups that frequent the bar, play lob-ball and form the social milieu in which The Boys immerse themselves. As I discussed in Chapter One, in recent years there has been a significant focus on the divisions within the working class which are fostered by the high degree of specialization characteristic of modern production techniques. The existence of these splits and the implications of them has been well documented. However, we see that among The Boys the informal group includes individuals from a wide variety of occupations with different levels of skill. Only the skilled tradesmen and the paper mill labourers fit the classic image of the blue-collar working man. An examination of the occupations of the members of the

informal group indicates how empty and misleading categorical divisions such as a white and blue-collar can be. For example, the jobs of civil servants among The Boys are not significantly different from typical blue-collar work in terms of the work routine and environment. We also see how individuals who are in occupational categories that are not working class according to some definitions, such as the two members of the informal group who work at the hardware store, identify with those who more closely fit a restricted definition of the working class with regard to the cultural activities of the informal group. The labour process may be a divisive influence on the working class, but these divisions are overcome in the informal group where the general experience of wage labour is itself a basis of commonality.

In this regard it is interesting to note that the university students slowly moved away from the group. Childhood and community bonds could not withstand the dissolving effect that the attainment of a university education effects upon former friends with whom interests were shared. The university students did not have a common basis in the experience of wage labour. Their educations have prepared them for a non-working-class life and thus they slowly lost interest in the activities through which The Boys express themselves outside of the work place. The mundane culture which The Boys celebrate is a reflection of



the nature of their work. It has none of the status and respect that belong to the more elite occupations and professions, and they make a virtue of necessity by celebrating their ordinariness.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE TOURNAMENT

### 3.1. Introduction

The importance of the ordinary, the prosaic as opposed to the poetic is especially evident in the leisure activities of The Boys. They have no interest in high culture, but they are very interested in the so-called low culture of the masses. Anything that is esoteric is elitist from their point of view. Thus mass culture is perceived as democratic because it does not exclude anyone, rather than as an example of the degradation of culture in the modern world.

Leisure time is "free time" and because of this the activities pursued during leisure time can be viewed as relatively pure examples of the cultural themes important to the working class. They can be interpreted as rituals which reveal the values held dear by the working class, just as Balinese cockfights express what it means to be Balinese (Geertz 1975a).

The freedom of leisure time is not absolute, but in the context of an industrial capitalist social formation it is free of the constraints which characterize wage labour for the working class.<sup>1</sup> "Free time" is governed by informal and

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<sup>1</sup> The dichotomy between the freedom of leisure time and the control over behaviour at work is not unique to capitalist society. It is a feature of the life of the working class in modern socialist societies and was a characteristic of modes of production based on slavery, as,

formal codes, ranging from unspoken ideas about what constitutes correct behaviour in any given context to the laws which control when, where, how and with whom leisure time can be spent. While the idea that leisure time is free must be understood in this limited sense, it is, nonetheless, the time when the working class is not under the direct control of the labour process and is more able to express itself and pursue its own desires (Clarke 1978). In modern wage labour individual characteristics are at best irrelevant and at worst actively suppressed by the rationale of the labour process (Braverman 1974, Lukacs 1971, Marx 1977). If one intends to describe and analyze expressions of working-class culture, what working-class individuals do during their free time, outside of their wage labour, is a logical focus.

Sport is one of the most popular leisure activities today in many parts of the world and certainly in North America and Western Europe. Few events attract the number of spectators that professional or high level amateur sports do, and few individuals gain the renown of top-calibre athletes. There is often a deep emotional and intellectual commitment on the part of fans and participants. The fortunes of teams and players are followed scrupulously. People have been moved to riot and nations to war over the

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for example, in the southern U.S. before 1865.

outcome of games and/or the treatment of players.<sup>2</sup>

The Boys are very interested in sport, both as spectators and participants. Watching and playing sport are major leisure activities, although by no means are they The Boys' only leisure interests.

In this chapter I discuss the leisure life of The Boys, focusing on sport and in particular a version of softball that was very popular when I was in Thunder Bay.<sup>3</sup> From mid-May until the end of August lob-ball was the main focus of The Boys' attention during time off work. They played at least twice a week and often on weekends, and sometimes would go to watch games on other evenings. Unlike spectator sport and other public rituals which are in the control of the dominant social groups in society, lob-ball is The Boys' game. It is a dramatic spectacle, however mundane it may appear to outsiders, in which they act out the values of their own culture.

### 3.2. The Leisure of The Boys

As a means of contextualizing the discussion of

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<sup>2</sup> British football hooligans have received much attention in recent years. But spectator violence is not limited to the British -- it has even been reported in the Soviet Union -- and is not a particularly recent development: the Montreal hockey riot took place in 1955. In 1970, Honduras and El Salvador fought the famous "football war" (Taylor 1982:40-41).

<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing The Boys are still active in the league.

baseball, I want to begin with a general description of the leisure practices of The Boys. It is important to keep in mind that leisure is circumscribed by work. Forty or more hours of each week must be spent in wage labour with the exception of holidays or periods of unemployment. The necessity of wage labour is always present, and for The Boys it involves fixed hours. Unlike academics, say, who are to some extent able to adjust their own work schedules to accommodate their chosen domestic routine and leisure activities, The Boys must follow the schedule established by management. They do try to arrange holidays to fit their own wishes, but young workers are generally low on the seniority list and thus frequently must take holiday periods which their older colleagues do not want. They also trade shifts with fellow workers, but this usually demands management's approval and opportunities to do so are limited since many workers prefer to have weekends and evenings off. One can rarely gain more favourable hours of leisure by trading shifts; one merely exchanges one weekend or evening for another. The skilled tradesmen among The Boys were frequently employed out of the city and thus could not return at will to participate in leisure activities with their friends.

Among The Boys there are a variety of leisure activities. In total hours, watching television may be the most important. As I noted in the preceding chapter, the

living rooms of apartments or houses are arranged around the television, symbolizing its importance in the household.

But television is not as all-encompassing of leisure time as this may suggest. The television is on virtually all of the time people are in the dwelling, but it is not necessarily being watched attentively. Television provides a background or complement to other activities. For example, the television is turned on immediately after returning from work, but the woman of the house frequently prepares dinner, while the man may sit and read the paper. The television is left on during dinner but again is a backdrop rather than a focus of attention.

After dinner, if the couple are not going out they may sit and watch television. Normally, though, there are certain shows which are preferred and which are actually attentively watched, while for the bulk of the time television falls into the background while the couple engage in other activities. For the women, this might involve doing the laundry, ironing clothes, knitting, preparing lunches for the next day, and, for those with children, there are the many tasks involved in child care. The men although less involved in the day-to-day domestic labour, do a lot of "puttering". For people with homes, there is grass to cut, or snow to shovel and a variety of minor home repairs. If friends come over to visit the television usually is left on unless they decide to listen the stereo.

Conversation or a game of cards or backgammon takes place against the background of the television. Television is thus an important component of leisure but is actually watched attentively only a part of the time it is on.

Another important leisure activity is shopping. Not all shopping can be thought of as leisure. Going for groceries is a regular weekly domestic duty and as such tends to be viewed as women's work. In Thunder Bay this involves going to a large supermarket often located in a shopping mall. There are few small local shops, consequently grocery shopping is very inconvenient without a car.

Shopping as a leisure activity is more common for women than for men. Women often go shopping while boyfriends or husbands watch sports on television or go to a bar with their friends. But shopping is not exclusively women's activity and it does not necessarily entail purchasing something. Rather, it involves going to the mall and wandering through the stores, perhaps stopping for a coffee, especially if, as frequently happens, one meets friends. For some commentators the destruction of small community shops, the creation of suburbia and the rise of shopping malls are often indicative of the decline of working-class communities and a distinctive working-class culture. But in Thunder Bay, where the winter is long and cold, malls are a location for socializing, albeit one that is constructed to

promote consumerism. Jerry Jacobs (1984) views shopping malls as a place where one attempts to escape reality. But they also, together with automobiles without which malls could not exist, provide a means by which the individuation of modern life can be overcome to a small extent.

Social drinking is an important part of the life of the local working class, especially for young workers who do not have children and therefore have more free time and money. Alcohol, among The Boys at least, was not appreciated in and of itself. They are not lone drinkers. One is always offered a beer or sometimes a drink of hard liquor when one visits, but it is rare for the Boys to sit by themselves and have a drink. They are not "connaisseurs" of wines, beers or liquors.

It is common for people to "go out drinking" at least once a week. One young couple I knew budgeted \$40 a week for Friday night in the bar. Generally, men drink more than women on any particular night out, and go out drinking more often than women. Indeed, the women, when they accompanied their husband or boyfriend to the bar, often had to "take it easy" so they could drive home. Going out drinking is a group activity. Individuals or couples, even if they initially go alone, expect to meet friends at the bar. As is described below, drinking is also an aspect of other leisure activities such as participatory sports.

There are a variety of bars in Thunder Bay, ranging



from those which charge a cover fee and have a dress code to the working-class bars where people can dress casually and just sit and drink beer. The informality of the latter is favoured by The Boys, although they also patronize other types of bars from time to time. They distinguish between more and less respectable bars. Those known to have a large Native clientele, for example, are generally avoided.

Hunting and fishing are also popular leisure activities in Thunder Bay. The degree of interest varies, of course, from individual to individual. Some couples I know spend as much time as possible camping and fishing. Both the men and women enjoy the outdoors and they have spent a considerable amount of money on four-wheel drive vehicles, boats, motors, campers for the back of trucks and fishing equipment. The typical pattern for The Boys, however, was to make a couple of weekend-long fishing trips during the summer. Sometimes this was a male-only event, but wives and girlfriends often went along.

Participatory sports of various kinds are very popular in Northwestern Ontario. A study of communities of 1,000 or more people in the region conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation (MTR) in 1982 found that 44% of the sample population participated in 45 different sports. This excludes sports which do not have a minimal form of organization, such as "road-hockey" or "sand-lot-baseball".

The study differentiated between: casual sport, which was structured by the players themselves on an ad-hoc basis (e.g. pay-as-you-play hockey or randomly-booked squash games); organized sport, which has some form of administrative structure and regular competition (e.g. house leagues); competitive sport, which involves regular and organized skill instruction, practice time and advanced competition; and elite sport, which is aimed at maximizing the performance levels of the participants through high quality instruction, regular practice, and competition at provincial, national and/or international levels.

The most popular categories by far are casual and organized sport, which involves some 67,318 participants, or 80% of the MTR study's sample. The age category of 23 to 35 had the highest number of participants in sport, and there was a two-to-one ratio of male to female participants in all categories. The eight most common organized sports in Northwestern Ontario were, in order of frequency, five pin bowling, ice hockey, golf, softball, curling, baseball, soccer, and shooting. In five pin bowling women outnumber men, but in the other seven sports listed men outnumber women. Ice hockey and shooting are almost exclusively male activities (Ontario n.d.).

### 3.3. Softball and Its Variations

The kind of softball played by The Boys falls into the

category of organized sport; there is a league structure but it is not competitive in the sense of regular training and practice. In the summers of 1984, 1985 and 1986 the city was alive with softball fever. Every Monday through Thursday evening, from the beginning of June to the middle of August, the numerous baseball fields in Thunder Bay were occupied. On most weekends there was at least one tournament. An employee of the MTR in the city estimated that there were in excess of 300 teams (personal communication).

A variety of kinds of baseball and softball are played in the city. There is a senior hardball league, but it consists of only three teams and draws very few if any spectators. There are also little league teams for children between the ages of six and sixteen which also play hardball modelled on the style of the professional major leagues. It is played with a small hardball which is pitched overhand. There was also a fastball league. In this version of the game the ball is pitched underhand at a high velocity, and good pitchers have a repertoire of pitches -- curves, sinkers, change ups, and fastballs to name a few.

But the interest for the largest number of people is a kind of softball that requires less skill and is therefore open to a larger segment of the population. There are two varieties: slo-pitch and lob-ball. In the former, a larger ball than that used in fastball is pitched underhand toward

the plate. Balls and strikes are called by an umpire as in regular hardball, but there is a rule governing the speed of the pitch. In practice this is a frequent subject of dispute between the teams and the umpire. The goal, however, is to make it relatively easy to hit the ball. A larger ball, approximately thirty-five centimetres in diameter, is employed in lob-ball. As implied in the name of the game, the ball is lobbed in a high arc rather than thrown across a plate. Balls and strikes are determined by whether or not the ball lands on a mat placed against the plate, rather than the path of the ball across the plate.

Other rule changes also make the game easier to play. There are ten players on the field rather than nine as in standard baseball. The extra player is normally used as a fourth fielder, although there is not a specific rule governing his or her positioning. To speed up the game, two strikes make an out, and three balls make a walk. A foul ball on the last strike is an out. There is a "mercy rule". If after five innings one team is leading by fifteen or more runs, a not unusual happening in my experience, the game is over. In the "mixed leagues" each team must have at least three women on the field at all times.

The rule changes have the overall effect of making the game easier and faster to play, but this does not mean the games are not competitive. The players hope to win, and decisions made by the umpires are sometimes the subject of

heated argument. Indeed, within the various slo-pitch and lob-ball leagues there is a gradation in the level of competitiveness and the seriousness with which the players approach the game. Every team has its "star" and its less illustrious players. Individual teams sometimes have problems because some players are concerned with winning, while others are there simply to have fun.

Generally, though, fun is the point of the whole exercise. Anyone who takes the competitive element of these games too seriously is frowned upon. There is an unwritten, but nonetheless understood, set of rules governing appropriate behaviour. Efforts are made to avoid body contact in, for example, close plays at home plate or first base; one does not express disappointment too strongly over an error or when striking out; and one does not publicly criticise other people's play. These rules are frequently transgressed. The only means of enforcing them is through ostracism, gossip and name-calling. Post-game discussions are often centred on such matters -- "So-and-so was a real asshole tonight", "X is a goddamn jerk". The fine line between not trying hard enough and thereby ruining the competitiveness of the game, and playing more intensely than is considered appropriate and thereby lessening the fun must be continually negotiated by the participants. Individuals who are more serious about athletics, skill levels and competition play hardball, fastball or other more demanding

sports. Serious athletes who play in the slo-pitch or lob-ball leagues must carefully judge their behaviour if they wish to avoid derision, for these games are not intended to be taken too seriously, at least not if it ruins the fun for others. Such players are particularly prone to be seen as prima donnas since, it is thought, the only reason they play at this level is to show off.

The working-class bar that sponsors the league in which The Boys play is very popular. One of the brothers who own and manage the bar claims it is the busiest drinking establishment between Sudbury and Winnipeg. A local representative of one of the major breweries informed me that it is certainly the busiest bar in the city in terms of the quantity of beer sold.

Sponsorship of the league means the bar provides funds for field equipment such as the bases and homeplate, and helps cover the cost of the league tournament by supplying trophies, beer and food. The financial commitment is not large, in the hundreds rather than thousands of dollars. In the spirit of generalized reciprocity (Sahlins 1972:193-94) many teams' members regularly drink beer at the bar after games. Normally one team member is responsible for bringing a case of beer to the diamond. When the game is completed, the team members, along with girlfriends, wives, and friends, gather around the back of someone's pickup truck, drink beer and discuss the game, or just "shoot the shit",

that is to say, chat or gossip. When the beer is gone or it begins to get dark someone suggests going to the bar and, in my experience, at least a few individuals always take up the suggestion. The bar is conveniently located in relation to the league diamond, and if five or more team members in uniform are present the bar provides one or two free pizzas, depending on the number of people.

Teams must find their own sponsors. In the league in which The Boys play there are eight teams and all but two have sponsors. These include; an electrical parts equipment dealership, a gas station, a bowling alley, an automobile garage, a pizza restaurant and a roadhouse-style bar/restaurant. The amount of money donated by the sponsors varies and each team spends it as it wishes. The Boys' sponsor gave them two hundred dollars with which they purchased bats and balls and paid part of the team's entry fee for a tournament. Other teams bought uniforms, or at least covered part of the cost. The sponsor receives the publicity involved in having the company name in the newspaper one night a week when league standings are published, or if they are mentioned on the late night sports news on television. Some teams also had the sponsors' name on the uniforms.

Even with corporate sponsorship, participation in the lob-ball league can involve significant personal expense. The Boys bought their own uniforms at a cost of between \$70

and \$80 each. Baseball gloves range in price from \$40 to \$100 or more. Shoes, in some cases baseball cleats, cost on average \$30 to \$60 a pair. There is an individual league entry fee of \$10. In addition, there are the regular contributions to the team's beer fund, the money spent at the bar, tournament entry fees, hotel costs for those who go away for a tournament, and money spent on beer and food at tournaments, not to mention incidental expenses such as the gasoline used driving to and from the baseball diamond. It is impossible to make a strict calculation of the cost involved in playing lob-ball because individual habits vary, but for the basic equipment an expenditure of between \$100 and \$200 is required. A minimum of \$20 a week is spent on beer, and more than this when there is a weekend tournament. Given that with playoffs the season lasts three to four months, the cost of a summer of softball is easily \$400 to \$500 and may be considerably higher depending on how actively one participates in the social activities associated with the games. Of course, uniforms, gloves and shoes are not purchased every year so the cost decreases after the first year, and in some cases sponsors' contributions defray the expense of uniforms. Many of The Boys also participate in winter sports such as hockey which also involve buying equipment and the social "extras" this entails. A year of sport, even at this recreational level can cost \$1,000 and more.



The teams are based on informal groups. There are no team tryouts as in competitive sports. Although each team is allowed a roster of only twenty players, no one was ever prevented from playing on the basis of his ability. The teams are composed of friends and that is the only criterion for belonging to the team. Friendships cross team boundaries as well, linking all the teams in the league. In the bar after games the players of each team with girlfriends, wives and friends arrange the tables so that everyone can sit together. A "table" may consist of anywhere between two and thirty people. As the evening progresses people move about, visiting friends at other tables. On "good" nights the boundaries between tables dissolve and the entire bar is transformed into one extended informal group.

#### 3.3.a. The Game<sup>4</sup>

On a hot Tuesday night in July several of The Boys were gathered around the "dugout". The dugout consisted of a simple wooden bench. In the preceding years the baseball diamond had been repeatedly vandalized. Wooden dugouts were

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<sup>4</sup> The description which follows is from June 28, 1984. I was not a member of the team at this point. The events described are representative of many evenings of lob-ball that I observed and participated in. Because I describe particular events I have used the past tense throughout the description of the game, the tournament and the trip, but it should be kept in mind that the bar, the diamond, the league and The Boys' team still exist.

destroyed so the athletic association that manages the diamond had new ones constructed of cement blocks, but these were also demolished. The Boys were convinced that Indians from the nearby reservation were responsible, although no one was actually caught in the act.

Three girlfriends sat quietly behind The Boys in the bleachers. Besides being committed fans, the girlfriends and/or wives sometimes acted as scorekeepers and were often, as previously noted, designated drivers if their mate drank too much after the game. Across the field, the other team's dugout and bleachers looked exactly the same.

In addition to the girlfriends or wives, the only other spectators were two young Ojibwa boys who were climbing in and out of a wooden structure built behind the backstop. With the arrival of the teams who were to play in the second game the scene became more lively.

From the bench which served as a dugout one of The Boys offered me a beer. It was not unusual for the players to "warm up" with a beer and/or cigarette, and even to sip a beer and have a smoke in between innings or while waiting for their turn at bat.

The diamond was a ramshackle affair. The infield was gravel, making slides a courageous act. The outfield was natural grass in the real sense of the term, i.e. clover and crab grass as in nearby fields. The infield was raked sporadically to maintain a semblance of evenness, and the

outfield was mowed occasionally. The rough terrain caused the ball to take bizarre bounces from time to time. Footing could be treacherous in the outfield. After a rainstorm large puddles remained in the outfield and players had to stand ankle deep in the water to play their position correctly. Wooden boards served as the outfield fence. They were in dire need of paint and some had to be replaced because they were torn down by vandals. In right field, where the distance to the fence was shortest, an eight-foot wall had been constructed of pressboard to make it more difficult to hit home runs. "The Dogs", which was the nickname of the previous year's league champion, was written across the wall with orange spray paint. The name referred to the fact that the team was sponsored by a Husky service station that had a Husky dog on its logo.

The game was late starting. The umpires, who were members of a team playing in the next game, had not yet arrived. The Boys were restless. They had already warmed up.

Despite variety in shape and size, The Boys and other players in the league exemplified a body type which is emphatically not the lean, fit look of the health-and-fitness subculture, but rather closer to the "beef cake" variety. Some had already sprouted beer bellies despite their relative youth. As I have already indicated, strength and power is valued in their culture and this is expressed

in an appreciation of body size. As important as strength and power, however, is the obvious lack of concern for fitness. This is meat-and-potatoes and beer territory. There were team uniforms, but few players looked athletic. This was rarely an issue, certainly not for those who sat on the dugout bench drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette, waiting for the game to begin.

Another team member ambled in from the parking lot. The Boys have a manner of body movement which reflects the high value placed on the maintenance of expressive control. In the context of the lob-ball game, professional baseball players serve as a model. Perhaps more than other professional athletes they exude a casual air. However, The Boys' style of movement also reflects the macho male culture of the region. A great deal of effort is put into appearing nonchalant. One does not want to give the impression of being too keen or eager, or of trying too hard. Popularity is partly based on being good at a wide range of practical skills and physical activities without seeming to work at it. As I already stated anyone seriously involved in competitive athletics participates in other sports.

As he entered the dugout, Sam,<sup>5</sup> the new arrival, was greeted with: "What the fuck are you doing here? I thought you went to Dryden?" Sam responded as he lit a cigarette,

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<sup>5</sup> A pseudonym. Personal names have been changed throughout the thesis.

"I did. They promised me at the [union] hall we would have private rooms. But when I got there they wanted to make the single guys share, so I said 'fuck it.' Anyway, we got a big game tonight." He smiled.

Sam is an electrician. He had been unemployed for several months, but as he put it, he "didn't need the kind of bullshit [his] employer wanted to pull". Sam is big and strong, and athletically gifted. He was the team's home run hitter. As a teenager he was a very good hockey player and some thought he had the talent and size to be a professional one day. He left the city to play junior hockey in a higher calibre league than exists locally, but he got into trouble because of drinking and fighting and eventually gave up hockey. Even on the lob-ball team some players were frustrated with him because he was undependable, but he was their best hitter and he liked to party after the game, and so he was very popular.

The game began and like all the lob-ball games I watched and played in was a mixture of skilful, humorous, and pathetic plays. One moment there was a diving catch of a line drive, only to be followed by an easy fly ball that popped out of the fielder's glove. The effects of a well-executed doubleplay were negated when the shortstop picked up a routine ground ball and threw it twenty feet over the head of the first baseman. A running catch of a long fly ball came to nought when the fielder dropped the ball over

the fence thereby giving up a home run. The highlight, for me, of this game came when Sam made a long, running catch of a fly ball without removing the cigarette from his lips.

Although few players or teams ever made serious efforts to improve their play through practice or training, or by avoiding the bar the night before -- to do so might verge on being too eager -- games were taken seriously, in the sense that tempers flared and a real hostility sometimes developed between opposing team players, and between the players and the umpires.

On this particular evening The Boys won handily. As the next game's teams took over the bench that served as a dugout, we moved to the parking lot. One of the team members had a case of beer in the back of his half-ton. Drinking beer in a public place was illegal, but the diamond was across the Kaministiquia River from the west end of the city and the police rarely came around so no one was too concerned about drinking there.

As we stood around the back of the half-ton drinking beer, the conversation turned to who was going to the bar that sponsors the league. It was rare to have fewer than six of The Boys stop in the bar and take advantage of the free pizzas. The bar was a favorite for all kinds of teams, whether they played in the league or not, as well as for the crowd from the Wednesday night stock car races, and the men coming off their shift at the nearby paper mill, grain

elevators, rail yards and a light-transit car factory. A couple of The Boys said they could not come and were immediately barraged with insults. Work in the morning was no excuse, although it certainly did have a bearing on how "hard" the night would be.

My doubts about whether I could characterize the bar as working class were allayed months later when the wife of a psychology professor at the local university informed me that if I really wanted to know what the working class is like I should go to this bar. She had been there once, she said, shaking her head and raising her eyebrows.

The bar was a beige stucco, two-story building in the section of the city known as Westfort. Not only was the bar conveniently located near to a number of industries, it also had a community atmosphere. During a long bitter strike by the Canadian Paperworkers Union in 1976, the bar provided free coffee and sandwiches to the strikers. One could see three generations of men -- grandfathers, fathers and sons -- sitting together at a table. The brothers who currently owned and managed the bar were on a first-name basis with most of their clientele, as was their father who owned and managed the bar before them.

The interior of the bar was decorated in a baroque kitsch style. The walls were pressboard imitation wood panelling. They were covered with plastic clocks and neon signs bearing the insignia and names of different brands of

beer, stuffed fish and photographs of the stockcar the bar sponsors. On one wall beside a stuffed swordfish, there was a Swede saw handle with a chain where the blade should have been and a small electric motor attached to it. Below it was a sign that read "the day Anderson got took," a joke about the owner of the bar not recognizing a chainsaw. There was a large trophy case which contained stuffed birds, trophies won by teams sponsored by the bar, union insignia and a Kinsmen (a service club) flag on one wall. A colour television sat atop the trophy case. In one corner there was a huge television screen that was usually tuned to a sports or rock video station. Another neon sign flashed the names (such as "ball buster" and "orgasm") and prices of "shooters", drinks composed of a mixture of liqueurs and hard liquor, and when "shooter hour" began. The style of interior decoration in the bar was similar to that in the "rec rooms" of many local houses.

Thursday to Saturday nights a D.J. played music from 9 P.M. until 1 A.M. when the bar closed. There was a small dance floor, as well as a shuffle board table, a table hockey game, and a couple of video games. A small room, called the Bullpen, set off from the main part of the bar was sometimes used for team meetings.

Those patrons not wearing a team uniform were dressed in blue jeans and T-shirts for the most part. Many of the men wore baseball caps, some with team and others with



corporate insignia. The waitresses wore white T-shirts with the name of the bar across the front, white jeans and running shoes. One of them was the centre of attention as she tossed empty beer cans into a garbage container from several yards away. Whenever she missed there was a cheer from the onlookers.

As we settled around a table in the bar, it was noted that one of the gang whose girlfriend was at the game had decided not to come. "He's such a suckhole these days", my neighbour on the left commented. It was assumed he was dominated by his girlfriend and thus was weak.

After several beer, conversation began to flow as The Boys loosened up and became more expressive. It zipped back and forth over all kinds of subjects and was heavily spiced with jokes and humorous insults of the "bathroom" variety. As was frequently the case, the bulk of the conversation was a retelling for the umpteenth time of the escapades of several of The Boys during a recent weekend -- how much they drank, how one of them lost his wallet, how one of them passed out in the back seat of a car, and how a woman had tried to "pick up" one of them. The stories were told over and over again and seemed to become funnier with each telling, at least The Boys laughed harder each time. Of course, to those who were not there, the humour was less obvious. Such stories are a way of defining the group. Those who belong understand the humour.

As more beer was consumed, the noise level increased. Someone had only a \$20 bill, and so paid for a round. There were ten of us, plus two girlfriends. Not wanting to break the cycle of reciprocity all of us, but one, took turns buying a round.

### 3.3.b. The Tourney Weekend<sup>6</sup>

A highlight of the lob-ball season in Thunder Bay for The Boys was the weekend tournaments. There were tournaments almost every weekend through June, July and August. The Boys entered four tournaments, three in Thunder Bay and one in Duluth, Minnesota an American city approximately three hundred and fifty kilometres south of Thunder Bay. Duluth is the nearest relatively-large city and residents of Thunder Bay frequently visit there just to "get away" or to shop.

Tournaments were usually sponsored by one of the large beer companies such as Labatt, Molson or O'Keefe, or a local hotel or bar. There were "mixed" tournaments, in which the teams included both men and women, and others where the teams were either all male or all female.

Tournaments usually began on a Friday night and continued through to Sunday afternoon or evening when the winners were determined. Given the short time, there was

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<sup>6</sup> The tournament described here took place June 14-16, 1985. I was a member of the team at this point.

often a no-postponement rule, so games were played regardless of the weather unless there was lightning.

As with the games, no two tournaments were exactly alike, but the description of the following tournament includes features common to all the "tourney weekends" as they are called in the local vernacular. It also illustrates a number of elements in the culture of The Boys, for "tourney weekends" are a local version of carnival, a two-day party.

The Boys looked forward to this "tourney weekend" with a great deal of excitement. A certain amount of planning was required: entrance fees had to be collected from those who wanted to play, women had to be chosen for the team since this was a mixed tournament, and time off work had to be booked or shifts traded by those scheduled to work over the weekend.

The Boys prepared themselves mentally by alternatively propounding the need to avoid excessive partying if they were going to win and retelling stories of last year's tourney weekend escapades. The latter sent them all into fits of laughter as they reminded one another of their antics. Apparently, several team members, after drinking into the early hours of the morning, had slept in the outfield so they would not oversleep and miss a 9 A.M. game. The next morning they were dirty, smelly and hungover, but proud of the fact they were on time.

Choosing the women for the team was a rather contentious affair. A debate developed over whether several of the girlfriends should be asked to play, or whether The Boys should approach other women they knew who regularly played on a women's or mixed team. There was also the question of what positions the "girls" would be allowed to play, where they would do "the least damage to the team," as one of The Boys expressed it. These issues were never resolved; a few girlfriends and other women were asked to join the team for the tournament and The Boys never did agree ahead of time on what positions they would play.

The tournament was held at the diamond used by the league in which The Boys' team regularly played, although some of the tournament games were located at a second diamond on the nearby Fort William Indian Band reservation. Teams from all over the city participated.

The first games of the tournament were played Friday night. By seven o'clock the parking lot at the diamond was full and the outfield fence was ringed with halfton trucks and cars. People sat on lawn chairs in the back of the trucks or reclined on the trunks of the cars drinking beer and soaking up the evening sun. The men were bare-chested and the women were in bikini tops. Children raced up and down the trail around the diamond on their bicycles. Bruce Springsteen, The Cars and ZZ Top blared from car stereos.

The Boys played in the second game of the evening.

They lost the game, in part at least, because several of them were so convinced of the incompetence of the women that they would not throw the ball to them. Thus, what should have been several easy outs turned into runs scored as The Boys tried to chase down base runners rather than throw the ball to the women.

After the game, the teams moved to the hall which was located next to the ball diamond. Inside, beer, hot dogs and hamburgers were sold. The hall was a simple, rectangular building of grey cement blocks. It contained kitchen facilities, washrooms and rows of long tables. The cement blocks were unpainted and there were no windows, so it was a drab and gloomy building.

The team settled around a table and began the post-mortem on the game. When it became evident that there was a certain amount of tension over the way the women on the team were or were not "used", a couple of The Boys who were angry with everyone else moved to one end of the table with their girlfriends and continued the conversation, while the others went to get more beer.

There were several teams in the hall and as the sun went down more people moved in. Around ten o'clock someone decided music was needed and so backed his car into the open delivery doors at one end of the hall and turned the volume on the car stereo to maximum. Soon, even though the music was so loud it was impossible to talk without shouting,

conversation became much more amiable and the jokes and sexual innuendoes began to flow.

When I left just before midnight the whole team was there and still proclaiming its intention to take it easy since we had to win the next day if we wanted to get into the playoff round. In the tournaments, teams must provide people to act as umpires for some games in which they are not playing. It was my turn in the morning. As I got up to leave, one of them reminded me that I was to umpire a game played on the baseball diamond on the nearby Indian reserve. The reserve is also known as the Mission, since it was the site of a Jesuit mission established in 1849. "Bring your bows and arrows tomorrow, you're going to the Mission," I was reminded as I went out the door.

The next morning was a beautiful sunny day, with a deep blue, crystal-clear sky. I arrived at the diamond which sits at the foot of Mount McKay before anyone else. Ojibwa legend says that Thunder Bird lives on top of the 300 metre hill.

The towering mountain with its granite cliffs, the bright green of the vegetation in the early summer and the blue sky stood as an abrupt juxtaposition to the dilapidated community centre and the baseball diamond located behind it. The community centre was old and dirty. The windows had all been shattered and the openings covered with pressboard, the bandage for the wounds society inflicts on old buildings.

The stairs were crooked and the door, suspended by one hinge, hung at an angle. Grafitti had been spray-painted over the walls.

The diamond was just as sorry a sight. The outfield fence was broken down in several places. The field was uneven and full of potholes. The outfield grass was ankle-deep and the infield was a very soft sand-and-gravel mixture. There were no anchors for the bases and the stands, backstop and fence had not been painted. The weathered plywood of the outfield board bore the spray-painted names of several heavy-metal rock bands, AC/DC, Quiet Riot and so on. Home plate faced Mount McKay which stood majestically over the whole scene, and as I sat waiting for the teams and other umpires to arrive a hawk circled lazily, floating on the air currents.

The other umpires, two of The Boys, arrived at the same time as the teams. A young Native man and two small children sat in the stands. As Dick got out of his car he put his sunglasses on. "I think I'm bleeding to death through my eyes," he said. "Hard night?," I inquired. "Not bad, I got three hour's sleep." Floyd carried a Macdonald's orange juice over from his truck. "This is how bad it is. I can't believe I had a Macdonald's breakfast." He took a drink of the orange juice, suddenly became very pale and ran to the nearest bush.

The first game was played quickly. One team gained a

huge lead and we invoked the mercy rule after five innings. In between games Dick and Floyd drove to the other diamond to get some beer from the hall. While they were gone, the next two teams arrived and began their warm-up. One of teams was from Jack Pine, a rural area on the north edge of the city. They announced their arrival by roaring into the parking area in a half-ton truck, wildly fishtailing, and screeching to a halt inches from the backstop. Three team members crawled out of the back of the truck, apparently not aware of the danger they had been in. Several of the players were obviously still intoxicated from the night before. One of them said to me, "We practice not sleeping on the weekends."

This game was quite close and I had a few tense moments as umpire as both teams told me in no uncertain language I did not know what I was doing. Actually, they were correct since I did not know, in a formal sense, what the rules were. The three of us who were acting as umpires were following what we understand the rules to be from watching and playing games, not from a knowledge of written rules. Although arguments about rules were common, I never saw anyone refer to a rule book. The biggest dispute of the game erupted when a fly ball bounced off the shoulder of a fielder and over the fence, or where the fence would have been if it had been standing. Was it a double or a home run?



Eventually, the effects of a sleepless and intoxicated night caught up with the team from Jack Pine. Their defeat was appropriately represented when a fly ball was hit to one of the fielders who was still feeling the effects of the night before. Because he was having such trouble moving, the other umpires had nicknamed him Jim Morrison after the late lead singer of the rock group The Doors who was known to be a heavy drug user. He did a couple of drunken pirouettes while looking into the sky for the ball and then collapsed in a heap. The ball landed on the exposed white flesh of his stomach. Two young Ojibwa boys who were leaning on one of the upright outfield fences doubled over with laughter.

By the time the game ended it was noon and we went to the main diamond for a lunch of hot dogs and beer. The reward for my morning's work was two beer tickets. The parking lot was full. Like the previous evening, the ball park had taken on the aura of a beach. The boards surrounding the outfield were ringed with vehicles again. People were sitting or lying in the backs of trucks or on cars drinking beer, watching the game in progress and sunbathing. A steady banter flowed between the audience and the outfielders, many of whom were good friends. The verbal exchanges were encouragements for good plays, mild insults, and ironic praise -- the bigger the error, the more grandiose the applause. Periodically, one of the

outfielders came over to the fence for a sip of someone's beer and/or a drag on a cigarette or sometimes a joint of marijuana. As I stood watching the game and enjoying the sun two fielders ran into each other trying to catch a fly ball. Neither made the catch and the audience sent up a huge cheer. The two players started to call each other Daryl, in reference to characters in the Bob Newhart Show.<sup>7</sup> The onlookers joined in.

A moment later a home run careened over the fence and struck a woman on the head as she sunbathed on the hood of a car. Apparently, she was unhurt. She immediately jumped up, rubbed her head, and, standing on the hood of the car, made a bow to the rest of the crowd who cheered.

I found a spot to lean on the outfield fence. Two fellows who played for another team in the same league as The Boys stood beside me. They were having a discussion about various people's drinking habits and when it was best to drink what. They knew someone who never drank anything but beer, and even though he drank it all day he never got drunk.

As I turned to look around, I noticed two of The Boys who apparently had been standing behind me for some time. One of them, laughing, yelled at me, "We must stink, eh?" He came over, grabbed my buttocks and said, "that's nice."

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<sup>7</sup> The characters of this television comedy include three brothers who are hillbillies, two of whom are named Daryl.

The other one said to me, "I told you he's a fucking fag."  
"Look who is talking," came the reply, "I feel sorry for your old lady [i.e. girlfriend]. Maybe I should go and visit her." "Go ahead. You wouldn't know what to do anyway."  
"Nah, after she had me she wouldn't want to go back to that puny thing of yours, then you'd be pissed off." "Listen to the bull shit!" he said and, turning his back to the other, he farted and pretended to throw his beer on the other one.

A van pulled up behind us. A little Native boy got out and stood on tiptoes trying to see over the fence. He called to his Grampa who was driving the van. Grampa was a tall thin man, dressed in pointed cowboy boots, pressed blue jeans, a plaid cowboy shirt, a shoelace tie and a tall, straw Stetson with a feather in one side. Grampa asked his grandson if he could see his Mom, and then tried to point her out to him. Mom was playing for the team on the field. They wore black and yellow uniforms like the Pittsburgh Pirates, with crests on them that said "Olde Union Pub". When Grampa and his grandson wandered off to find a seat in the bleachers behind the team benches, one of The Boys beside me took off his baseball cap and rubbed his hair. "Just checking to see if its all still there," he said, and then he put me in a headlock and said, "kiss me".

The Boys had a game that afternoon at three o'clock on the diamond at the Mission. Despite their often-stated determination to win, everyone loosened up with a few beers.

Of course, this was not really a factor because every team had been doing the same thing. The game itself was not particularly eventful. The Boys jumped out to a big lead, but then lost it partially because some of them would not throw the ball to the women on the team. The only drama was when one of The Boys dove for a foul ball, crashed into the backstop fence, and seriously injured himself. He was driven to a hospital by one of the friends who had come along to drink beer and sit in the sun. Although everyone was concerned about his injury, they were also convinced he was just showing-off for the female spectators.

When the game ended, amidst arguments about whose fault the loss was, and where the "girls" should have been allowed to play, everyone went back to the hall for a beer. After a couple more beers the loss was pretty well forgotten, with the exception of one team member who in everyone's opinion was too intense about these matters. Randy got a small barbecue out of the tool box in the back of his half-ton and began to prepare his dinner. Now that they were no longer in the tournament, The Boys did not have to worry about behaving themselves and they settled into having a good time. They now concentrated on winning the team beer-drinking trophy. Every time a team member bought a beer it was recorded by the people working at the bar. At the end of the weekend the count was tallied and the team which had bought the most beer won. The trophy was three Molson

Canadian beer cans on a fake marble stand with images of baseball batters made out of cheap metal and painted gold on top of the cans.

Saturday evening there was a dance in the hall. The Boys did not bother to change out of their uniforms, nor did most of the members of other teams. The hall was full and hot. Music was provided by a D.J. with his own sound system. The D.J.'s girlfriend looked completely out of place dressed in a tight-fitting red satin dress. Everyone else in the grey cement hall wore either baseball uniforms or T-shirts and blue jeans. The girlfriend of the fellow sitting across the table from me said the D.J.'s girlfriend must be from out of town. Someone else said she looked like a prostitute. The beer flowed freely and when the D.J. put on Van Halen's hit song "Jump" the dance area was packed with people.

Aside from partying, The Boys used the "Boogie", as these dances are referred to, to sell tickets to a benefit they were planning to hold for the wife of a deceased former team member. After he died, The Boys put his initials on the sleeves of their uniforms, and immediately began to plan the benefit for his wife. She was about three months pregnant when he passed away. At the hardware and lumber store where he worked there were no benefits or life insurance for the employees' families.

On Sunday the carnival atmosphere returned to the

diamond, although it was a little more subdued since people were recovering from the night before and facing the start of the work week. Even though The Boys did not win anything for playing baseball, they generally considered the weekend to have been a success. Many tickets for the benefit were sold, and they won the team beer-drinking trophy.<sup>8</sup> As they lay in the back of someone's half-ton truck bantering with the outfielders of the teams in the playoff game and sipping beer, they were already planning for the next tourney weekend.

### 3.3.c. The Trip<sup>9</sup>

Going away for a "tourney weekend" was considered to be another highlight of the summer by The Boys. These events were planned long in advance. The Boys started discussing the trip a year in advance. Once the summer arrived a team must be assembled, entry fees collected either from the individuals or a sponsor, and transportation arranged. For this particular trip, there was a debate about whether they should rent a van and all go together or take several individual vehicles. No one wanted to have to drive because it would cut into partying time. Work schedules had to be arranged, holidays booked or shifts traded with someone

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<sup>8</sup>. The benefit raised almost \$4,000.

<sup>9</sup> The trip discussed here took place over the July 4th weekend, 1985. The tournament was part of the Independence Day celebrations in the United States.

else, and accomodation had to be arranged.

A snag arose when several of the wives and girlfriends announced their desire to accompany The Boys. They were not interested in the tournament; they just wanted to get out of Thunder Bay for a couple of days and maybe do some shopping. They planned to go together in one vehicle and said they would not interfere with The Boys' fun.

Regardless of the proposed arrangements, the women's presence was one thing The Boys did not want as they were convinced it would spoil the trip. During the three weeks preceding the actual trip, a major topic of conversation was the women's desire to come along. One of The Boys, who the others considered to be dominated by his girlfriend, was thought to be responsible for the problem. He probably wanted his girlfriend to come, they reasoned, and therefore planted the idea. At various times it was suggested someone should inform him he was no longer welcome. As it turned out, no one ever did. The women decided not to go at the last minute and everyone was happy, at least according to The Boys.

I did not go on this trip, but I heard of it in the weeks that followed through the endless telling of the escapades of The Boys. When The Boys first returned from the "tourney weekend" in Duluth they were rather quiet about their trip. Inquiries were met with a pat, "Oh, it was all right." As time passed, however, the weekend became

increasingly interesting, or at least the stories became funnier in the opinion of The Boys.

As is true of much of the dialogue between The Boys, the verbal representation of the trip took the form of a series of anecdotal vignettes. These were told humorously as mock insults of one another. There was the story of how Frank passed out in the car with his face pressed up against the window and how ugly he looked; there was the story about Jack having a box of beer cans split open and how the cans rolled down the stairs and through the lobby of the hotel The Boys were staying in; there was the tale of how one of The Boys, getting back late to the hotel, found Chris drunk and naked in the lobby of the hotel, searching for a washroom -- Chris remembered none of it; there was the story about the team that won the championship and the "big fuckers" they had playing for them, including someone who had played for the Detroit Tigers; there was the story about someone who had vomited in the car and how much it and he stank. Finally, there was the story about the silly conversation two of The Boys had in the van on the way to the tournament. Apparently they were sitting in the back of the van and the others heard them talking about the stars they could see out the back window. One of them said, "Wow, man!" The Boys thought this expression was hilarious.

The stories were told over and over again through the remainder of the summer and came to have an evocative power.



Someone would just have to say, "Wow, man" and everyone would break into hysterical laughter. "Wow, man" became the appropriate response to almost any event or comment for the rest of the summer.

All the stories had the same power. Every time they were told they appeared hilarious to The Boys who had been on the trip. They became part of the collective memory by which The Boys defined themselves. Only insiders really knew the meaning of the stories. The humour of the story demanded that, as the saying goes, you had to be there. Eventually, the stories did not have to be told in their entirety. One or two appropriate words was enough to trigger the laughter.

#### 3.4. Interpretations

Before I proceed with my interpretation of the meaning of lob-ball within The Boys' culture allow me to briefly review various theoretical approaches which have been employed in analyses of modern sport.

Sport has been seen as a ritual which mirrors society (Arens 1981), and as a means of representing society's most cherished values and instilling them in individuals (Bittel 1981). It has also been viewed as a cathartic mechanism, a way of releasing pent-up frustrations for both society and individuals (Mumford 1934:303-304). Marxist versions of the cathartic thesis interpret sports as the "bread and

circuses" of the modern state, a secular "opiate of the people" (e.g. Hoch 1972). Professional sport has also been interpreted as a means by which members of subordinate social classes and ethnic minorities have been able to move up the social ladder when other "normal" paths of advancement have been blocked (Reiss 1980). "Sporting countercultures" have been represented as a means of expressing opposition to the values of a dominant class (Rader 1979:318).<sup>10</sup>

As a ritual, sport plays a function similar to that of religion, especially in the secularized cultures of contemporary Western capitalist and communist nations. Professional and high-level amateur athletes often attain a status approaching sacredness.<sup>11</sup> As such they are important symbols, modern heroes, who embody and express character traits highly valued in society. In modern Western nations (and perhaps in others as well) these include courage,

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<sup>10</sup> Rader (1979:318) sees prize fighting, "blood" sports, horse racing and other "riotous" amusements in 19th century Britain and the United States as a counterculture developed against Victorian values.

<sup>11</sup> This is very evident in the trade of Wayne Gretzky, the star hockey player, from the Edmonton Oilers to the Los Angeles Kings in August of 1988. The issue was raised both in the House of Commons in Ottawa and the provincial legislature in Edmonton. Both politicians and media personnel referred to Gretzky as a Canadian national symbol. The Gretzky trade prompted a public backlash against Peter Pocklington, owner of the Oilers, including a boycott of companies owned by him and the formation of a group dedicated to purchasing the team to prevent future trades of star players.

perseverance, self-discipline, confidence, commitment to the team and to goals, and subordination to authority (Hargreaves 1982, Birrell 1981). The media presentation of mass spectator sporting events emphasizes these values. Talented but "undisciplined" players are the object of scorn, while "hard workers" and "team players" are praised. One of the clearest ideological messages easily discernable in any sport telecast is the importance of unquestioned subordination to authority figures such as referees and coaches.

Sport also contributes to the constitution of nationalist sentiment through international competition, where the state of the nation and the legitimacy of political regimes is bound up with the performance of a country's athletes. This is evident in the fact that sport is an important aspect of foreign and domestic policy in the Soviet Union (Morton 1982), and boycotts of international sporting meets have been used by both sides in the Cold War.<sup>12</sup>

Values such as discipline, respect for authority and commitment are important in any form of state. Some aspects of the structure of competitive sport, however, correspond particularly well to the ideology of a capitalist

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<sup>12</sup> Morton (1982) argues that despite Soviet claims to the contrary, sport in the Soviet Union has developed in ways similar to the situation in Western capitalist nations. It places an "exaggerated emphasis" on elite sports and suffers from overcommercialization.

mode of production. Just as one's location in the class structure is, according to the ideology, determined solely by competition in the marketplace, individuals or teams begin each match as equals, and winners and losers are determined by the skill displayed in competition -- a clear representation of the principle of meritocracy upon which capitalist societies are supposedly based.

In Western capitalist nations (although not only in these nations) there is also a close relationship between commercialism and sport. Corporate sponsorship of teams and leagues was and is a means of strengthening paternalistic ties between employers and employees. Prior to the second world war many companies in what was then Fort William and Port Arthur had teams and commonly put "star" players on the corporate payroll.<sup>13</sup> This practice was common in the United States and Britain as well (Wheeler 1978:194; Reiss 1980:300-301; Schleppi 1979). Today professional and high-calibre amateur athletes are eagerly pursued by corporations searching for product endorsements. The sale of the exclusive right to associate corporate names with sporting events is now an important financial resource for so-called amateur sports. Even at an event such as a lob-ball

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<sup>13</sup> This aspect of local sports history has not been investigated; however, it is part of the popular history of the area. Many older individuals reported the practice to me and could name people who were employed by companies but whose actual main duty was to play baseball or hockey for the company team.

tournament in Thunder Bay, the corporate presence is felt. Beer companies sponsor tournaments, providing prize money and awards such as trophies, caps, and shoulder bags. Sales representatives make the presentations at the end of the event, and the company's "community service" vehicle is present frequently if not throughout the weekend. In return for the corporate contribution to the event, only the sponsor's products are sold during the tournament.

Interpretations of sport which merely emphasize the obvious ideological elements are, however, too simplistic. They do not explain its popularity, especially for those members of society who do not belong to the dominant social groups or classes. It is one thing to recognize the way in which sport mirrors society, it is another to explain why large numbers of people in society are captivated by sporting events. One must ask whether the ideological messages explicitly expressed or encoded in the structure of a competitive game are passively absorbed by the viewers or whether alternate interpretations are possible.

Sport has a compelling dramatic element. In a match, the audience sees many features of everyday life played out in dramatic form. Whether the athletes intend to play the roles or not, some are cast as villains and others as "good guys", some are underdogs, some are despised for their privileges. The roles are assigned by the spectators and the media. Fans typically love the home team and hate the

visitors. The games become struggles between good and evil, between the privileged and the underprivileged, between the local and the foreign. In sport fate rules dispassionately; the outcome of a game often depends on an uncontrollable happening such as a lucky bounce. For committed fans referees' decisions are often perceived as examples of the misuse of arbitrary power, rather than the neutral exercise of authority.

Part of the appeal of sport to the masses is that unlike official rituals and the drama of professional theatre which are controlled by the dominant groups in society, sport offers the people a chance to play a role, to participate (Hargreaves 1982:124). One does not have to wait politely for the final curtain to express approval or disapproval. At spectator sports, the crowd is involved from the beginning, and in participatory sports average people can play roles as they see fit, not as an official script says they should. There is a populist element to sport which few other rituals have in modern society. Sport follows, in this sense, in the tradition of popular theatre and the great festivals of the Middle Ages (Hargreaves 1982:125). Theories which interpret modern sport only as a clever diversion created by the ruling class to undermine class consciousness, do not understand that sport provides an avenue for the assertion of class-being.

One must distinguish between mass spectator sports and

local participatory sports. The former are under the control of the bourgeoisie and as such possess the aura of officially-sanctioned rituals. But the audience has often contested this control, irrupting into the game and investing it with meaning contrary to official expectations. This is part of the rationale behind fan violence (Taylor 1982).

At another level, one must distinguish between the official presentation of a game and the way it is "read" by the spectators. Viewing a game on the television can be, and for The Boys often is, a social occasion. The Boys' interpretation of the event frequently varies considerably from that of the official commentators. Hockey Night in Canada, a veritable Canadian institution, is for the announcers a weekly display during the winter months of the values mentioned earlier -- commitment, courage, discipline, subordination to authority and so on. For The Boys it is an excuse to get together, drink some beer, play cards, talk about work and so on. The most interesting features of the hockey game in their opinion are the events which the official commentators ignore or criticize -- the fights,<sup>14</sup> a bad call by the referee, and the role of luck in determining the outcome. This is obviously not an expression of class

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<sup>14</sup> Violence in hockey at all levels of play is a major concern of sport officials in Canada. The federal government established a "Commission for Fair Play" in 1986. One of The Boys' major criticisms of Hockey Night in Canada telecasts is that they do not show replays of fights.

consciousness in the sense of a developed theory of class relationships, but it is an assertion of popular values against official interpretations.

Local sport has been an important aspect of the constitution of working-class culture. In England, football developed as a working-class activity, and football hooliganism has been interpreted as an attempt by working-class youth to reestablish a working-class presence and control over a sport which has been commercialized and taken over by the bourgeoisie (Korr 1978; Wheeler 1978; Baker 1979; Critcher 1979; Taylor 1982).

Bryan Palmer, a labour historian, argues that popular cultural events including sports were important in the maintenance of the working-class community in Hamilton prior to World War One.

These were not insignificant or minor events, inconsequential in the grand context of class conflict or the progressive expansion of the labour movement. Baseball games, mechanics' festivals, union balls, commemorative suppers, picnics and parades formed a vital part of the very stuff of everyday life, important in their own right and too long ignored by labour historians lusting after the episodic or explicitly political. They were part of a culture that bred and conditioned solidarity, a prerequisite to any struggle attempting to better the lot of working men and women. Their continuous presence in the years 1860-1914, despite shifts in their locale and importance, lent strength to the working-class community, providing coherence and stability that had important ramifications in other realms (Palmer 1979:58).



#### 3.4.a. Lob-ball as Signifying Practice

As a ritual lob-ball expresses the values central to The Boys' identity, both in the way the game is structured and the manner in which it is played. Some of these values are expressions of a subculture constituted in opposition to the dominant culture. Others, however, reflect ideas held throughout society and thus illustrate the extent to which hegemonic ideas have saturated the consciousness of The Boys and, by extension, the local white male working class. Lob ball is a clear example of the way hegemony operates in the modern state. It is a ritual rebellion which is contained within dominant structures of society. From a theoretical perspective, its ultimate social meaning is ambiguous; it is a "partial penetration" of the system to employ Willis's (1977) terminology.

Lob-ball is a celebration of the low side of the dichotomy between high and low culture. The Boys identify with the immediate, the local, the popular in all things. Sport of the nature of lob-ball is part of low culture. High culture is considered esoteric by definition, hence elitist, and The Boys' class upbringing has prevented their exposure to the cultural codes required to enjoy it. The Boys do not read literature; they do not listen to classical music; they do not go to the theatre even though there are two local theatre groups in the city; ballet is boring in their opinion, and men that are involved or interested in it

are suspected of homosexuality. Their interest in films, which is limited in any event, does not extend beyond the normal range of Hollywood productions -- one of them explained to me that he was not interested in any film which required thinking since the point of going to the movies was to relax. Lob-ball is a physical activity, whereas much of high culture is intellectual.

The rules of lob-ball are such that only those individuals with severe physical handicaps cannot play.<sup>15</sup> Serious athletes are not welcome and probably would not find the game interesting because of the relatively low level of competition involved. The Boys are interested in many team sports but not elite individual sports. They are not "jocks", a term which they use derogatorily to refer to serious athletes. Lob-ball is, therefore, accessible to anyone. It is a populist game.

The structure of the teams is also populist. They are formed on the most flexible basis -- friendship. There are no competitive tryouts and everyone plays. There is an attempt to ensure that everyone has equal playing time, or at least is satisfied with the amount of time he plays.

Lob-ball, like all team sports, is a group activity. This was a major factor in The Boys' explanations of their

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<sup>15</sup> One team had a member with a crippled leg which prevented him from running. He played backcatcher for them, a position which required relatively little mobility, and he took a regular turn at bat and ran the bases as best he could.

own interest in the game and in the importance of team uniforms. When I asked them why they liked lob-ball they all mentioned the importance of being part of a group.

It's fun and you're with other people. Its better than being at home by yourself.

It's good to get out and do things with other people. It makes you feel like you are part of something.

I think it is important to be part of a group. The uniforms make you feel like that. I feel sorry for people that don't have friends and can't do things like this. Besides its a laugh [laughing], these jerks are always doing something funny.

A father of one of The Boys who acted as the "coach" of the team,<sup>16</sup> compared belonging to the lob-ball team to his military experience in World War Two. Like The Boys he felt everyone feels the need to belong to a group. For his generation the war fulfilled that need because everyone joined the armed forces. He compared the behaviour of The Boys to that of his squadron in the airforce. Just as The Boys visited the bar after each game, their patrol flights were always followed by a trip to the pub. I asked him if the war was not actually about politics and ideology, and if these were not the reasons he had volunteered. As he recounted it, his volunteering had little to do with the fight against fascism because that did not really mean much

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<sup>16</sup> This amounted to no more than creating lineups for each game. The Boys asked him to do this because they felt there were too many arguments among themselves as to what positions they would play. Aside from this, though, the "coach" was not an authority figure.

to him at the time. He and a friend went for a beer after work one day and decided they would sign up. "Everyone was doing it and it seemed kind of exciting."<sup>17</sup>

The uniforms were and are, according to the coach, a very important element in the appeal of both joining the armed forces and of belonging to the lob-ball team. When I joined the team in the summer of 1985, initially I did not have a uniform and I was reluctant to spend the \$70 or \$80 that a new uniform cost. Without my requesting it, one of The Boys contacted someone who had been on the team two years previous and arranged for him to sell me the uniform for \$25. When I arrived for the first time wearing the uniform, everyone commented on my appearance. Later, over beers by the back of someone's half-ton truck, I asked why the uniform was so important. One of them answered that "it just makes you feel better, you feel like you're part of the team." As happened so often, many of the others met my questions with a look of exasperation. Was I really so dumb that I had to ask?

Within the informal group of the team, generalized reciprocity reigns supreme. No one asks who has or has not contributed to the team's beer fund. It is assumed everyone contributes his share. In the bar after the game, everyone

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<sup>17</sup> At the time he was working in a Hawker-Siddeley plant in Fort William. Aircraft were built there. Today the same plant is owned by a subsidiary of Lavalin Corporation and produces rapid transit cars for subways.

takes turns buying rounds. If someone is short of money one evening someone else or several other people stand him drinks. This "just happens"; one does not need to ask. Of course, the gift does contain an obligation. Everyone is expected to behave in the same manner. Anyone who is perceived to be too concerned with money, about who has paid for what, is the object of scorn. True friends, for The Boys, are people who give to each other without asking, and this extends beyond the walls of the bar after a game.

There is a great deal of male bonding involved in the game. Paradoxically, it is expressed most strongly in the endless series of jokes and innuendoes regarding homosexuality. The Boys are concerned about sexual orientation to the point of obsession. I have already indicated that men who, from The Boys' perspective, are overly interested in some element of high culture are suspected of homosexuality. Body and clothing styles are scrutinized for signs of homosexuality. A man who is too well-groomed is a potential homosexual as is any man who is overly emotional in public. "He's a fag", "You are a goddamn faggot" -- these are among the most common insults The Boys use. They are equally alert to what in their minds are signs of lesbianism, again identified on the basis of body language and clothing style.

Jokes with one another which have homosexual overtones invert The Boys' own obsession with heterosexuality. They

are part of the carnivalesque atmosphere that reigns, especially on "tourney weekends." They are also a sign of close friendship, for only with one's closest friends can one joke about such matters. Fear of being labelled as homosexual means that such horseplay can only take place within a context where one's masculinity is beyond doubt. Their joking with me in this manner signified that my own sexuality was not in doubt and that I was part of the group. It took almost a year to reach this stage.

I stated earlier that there is an interesting correspondence between the competitive element of sport and the competitive features of a capitalist mode of production. Lob-ball, at least the way it is played in the The Boys' league, deemphasizes the competitive nature of the game. The Boys do like to win, as do the other teams in the league, but competitiveness is tempered by the overriding principle of fun. It must not destroy the group and anyone who takes the game too seriously is the object of scorn. The object of the game is to have fun and anything that might jeopardize the realization of this end is shunned.

In the activities surrounding the game and especially during tournaments the carnivalesque spirit is evident. Bodily style emphasizes openness and release. Much of the humour relates to what Bakhtin (1984:368-436) refers to as

the material bodily lower stratum.<sup>18</sup> Excessive consumption leads to excessive release -- vomiting, farting, belching all of which is turned into a joke.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the lack of emphasis on competitiveness, the games are still dramatic. There are usually many runs scored and games often have a seesaw flow. One team will score a large number of runs, only to see their lead disappear when the opponents come to bat. Because of the quality of the field and the skill levels of the players, nothing can be taken for granted. There are no routine flyballs or groundballs in these games because one is never certain the ball will not take a strange bounce or the

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<sup>18</sup> Penises, arses, excretion, vomiting and farting are the subject of endless humorous commentary. Images of the material bodily lower stratum are also used in negative descriptions of other people. For example, in a discussion about someone who was considered to be a snob, one of The Boys said, "He's so stuck-up he thinks his shit doesn't stink." A common saying for someone thought to be stupid is, "He doesn't know his ass from a hole in the ground."

<sup>19</sup> Crawford (1984), in his "cultural account of health," compares the importance of self control in middle class American's ideas about how to achieve health with the working-class emphasis on release.

Release is the antithesis of discipline, a disengagement or extrication from imposed and internalized controls. Instead of a language of will power and regulation, there exists a language of well-being, contentment and enjoyment....

In the absence of a capacity to control one's life situation, more characteristic of working class experience, what is important is to have another attitude toward it, a positive and easy going attitude (Crawford 1984:81-82).

The tourney-weekends are a symbolic inversion of the dominant ideas about control and self-discipline.

outfielder will not trip and fall down. and even if no accidents befall the players, the play may not be completed because of a lack of skill. In many respects these games are more exciting and more fun than professional baseball games because mistakes and accidents are relatively rare at higher levels of play. Plays become routine and therefore hold less dramatic potential. Fate truly does rule at lob-ball matches and no one is in a hurry to try and change this through practice or training.

In all these ways, lob-ball is a means by which The Boys express and differentiate themselves from the dominant values they encounter in their work and in other areas of life, such as their interaction with government bureaucracy. In the dominant culture, especially in the 1980s, there is a strong moralistic and puritanical streak; the Boys celebrate fun. In the labour market they are individuated; in their leisure time they seek group activities. In everyday life they are buffeted about by economic forces and authoritarian structures; through the lob-ball team they emphasize human interpersonal relations based on friendship rather than necessity. The formal and impersonal principles of market exchange rule in the larger world; the group emphasizes generalized reciprocity. Lob-ball is a signifying practice through which The Boys try to construct a different world based on cultural themes denied in the dominant discourse and economic structures in which they are imprisoned.



#### 3.4.b. Economic and Ideological Closure

Lob-ball can be interpreted as ritual rebellion, but it is contained within clear economic and ideological structures. One of the marks of modern capitalist societies is the development of the "culture industry" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972). Leisure has in many respects become a commodity. One purchases fun in the marketplace, one no longer creates it out of self-produced use-values. This is a logical development of capital's ongoing search for a means of valorization. As it searches out new investment opportunities and new markets it penetrates regions of the world and parts of society previously untouched by the capitalist mode of production.

This is a double-edged process. On the one hand, it tends to separate consumers from producers. Critics fear the decline of cultural standards as cultural objects are aimed at the lowest common denominator so as to generate a mass market, and the destruction of unique cultural practices (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972; Hoggart 1957). People become passive consumers of culture rather than producers. The bourgeoisie spoonfeeds a thin cultural gruel to a complacent, individuated population and furthers the aims of capital in the process. Critical analyses of modern spectator sport are an extension of this logic to the area of sport. On the other hand, mass production does make

cultural products available to more people than was the case in the past. Modern printing techniques, for example, make it possible for greater numbers of people to read the classics, since they can be produced more cheaply and in larger quantity.

Modern sport has created a mass market for certain products, whether they be professional baseball games or baseball gloves. The Boys do spend a large amount of money on lob-ball and the game is suffused with commercialism, from the purchase of equipment and beer to the sponsorship of teams, leagues and tournaments by local and national businesses. In this sense, even though one can read lob-ball as a ritual expression of resistance to dominant economic and ideological features of the social formation in which The Boys live, it is enmeshed in a thoroughly capitalist set of structures. The system is in no way undermined by The Boys' activity.

But The Boys are imprisoned in another more strictly ideological web, although it is one with important effects on and relationships to economic phenomena. One of the most striking elements of The Boys' culture which is expressed in the game is the way in which gender is constituted. Women are included in the games but only in a supportive role. Their function corresponds to the role they play in domestic production. Just as women are responsible for reproducing male labourers by producing meals, clean clothes and a

comfortable environment in which to relax, and seeing to the Boys' emotional and sexual needs, at the lob-ball games they act as fans, as drivers if their mate drinks too much, and as providers of clean uniforms and food. It is not an exaggeration to say that a woman's primary role in this ritual is to ensure her man enjoys himself. In the bar after the games, the table normally divides into two halves, one for the women and one for the men. The latter generally carry on their conversations as if the women are not present. Once in a while, if the jokes become too crude, someone might say, "Hey, there's women present, take it easy." As often as not such an intervention is met with a laugh and a barrage of rude comments. The women sit at their end of the table, quietly talking among themselves.

The men are friends. Frequently the women do not know each other prior to meeting in the context of The Boys' game. The women's presence is dependent upon their male partners and they relate to the group as a whole, including the other women, through them.

Women who have grown up in Thunder Bay are socialized into a supportive role regarding the world of sports from a young age. In all the households I know, including the one I grew up in, the domestic routine is adjusted to fit the requirements of the son's and/or husband's leisure schedule. Mothers rush home from work to prepare a quick evening meal so the son or husband can make it to a 6 or 7 P.M. game. At

Tom Thumb and Peewee hockey games, gender divisions are clearly marked. The mothers/wives sit together and noisily cheer for their sons' team. The fathers sit together in another part of the rink. Generally, they are quieter than the women, and whereas the latter lend ardent emotional support to "their" team, the fathers discuss technical aspects of the game such as the merit of various players and team strategy. The young boys are on the ice. Many of them have not yet developed rudimentary hockey skills, but they all know the appropriate ritual response to any given situation. The young girls run around the rink in small packs, and hound their mothers for money for chips, pop and chocolate bars. The adults' attention is focused on the young boys and the game they play. A "good" daughter is one who does not annoy her mother (generally they do not approach their father in this context) by demanding too much attention. These young girls grow up having learned that male leisure comes first, especially in sports.

The Boys are young and their relationships with their girlfriends and wives are, with a couple exceptions,<sup>20</sup> still in the courting stage; that is children and lack of money have not yet come between them and their roles as parents had not overshadowed their relationship as lovers (Rubin 1976:49-68). This was true for those couples who lived

<sup>20</sup> As described in Chapter Two the informal group changed over the years. In 1985 two new members were married and had children, both are now divorced.

together as well as those who did not.

As I said in Chapter Two, although living together outside of marriage is common, marriage is still the norm. Sexual morality is, perhaps, looser than it was for the parental generation; yet the roles of males and females have not changed greatly. Women are still the "homemakers". All the girlfriends and wives worked in clerical or retail jobs, except for two who were in university.<sup>21</sup> None of them earned a higher salary than their boyfriends and none, other than the two students, were planning a career.<sup>22</sup>

The Boys still clearly distinguish between the women they would live with and expect to marry and those with whom one might "have a good time" for an evening or weekend. The "madonna/whore" dichotomy remains a powerful element of The Boys' image of women.

As was abundantly evident during the "tourney weekend" described above, women are assumed to be incapable, or at least less capable, of performing what are considered male activities such as sport. Of course, to an extent this is true because the women have rarely been invited to

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<sup>21</sup> Only one of these relationships survived. The man in this case returned to the local community college and upon graduation found a job in his line of work in Toronto. The woman, who had a professional degree from a university and was working in her profession in Thunder Bay, followed him.

<sup>22</sup> I am indebted to my wife for these very general comments. She, of course, had access to the women's perspective.

participate and have therefore rarely developed even the (in many cases) minimal skills the men have. Given the nature of lob-ball and the skill levels required, it is difficult to imagine that anyone, male or female, is incapable of playing. This division is simply a reflection of the ideological construction of the female as a lesser other.

Lob-ball, viewed as a ritual text, illustrates both the potential and limits of the development of class consciousness among The Boys, and by extension, the local male white working class. Raymond Williams has written that "what is properly meant by 'working class culture'" is "the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intentions which proceed from this" (1963:313). He contrasts this with bourgeois culture defined by the "basic individualist idea". Lob-ball is an expression of the social as opposed to the individual emphasis in The Boys' culture. But the basic collective idea that underlies their culture is enclosed within economic and ideological structures which render it a defensive reaction against the wider world rather than an opening into a possible future.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ETHNICITY AND REGIONALISM IN WORKING-CLASS CULTURE

### 4.1. Introduction

I now turn to a discussion of why ethnicity is such a powerful symbol in the myths which The Boys adopt to explain their own and others' place in a perceived set of power relations. In the previous chapter, using lob-ball as an example, I have shown how The Boys express resistance to their subordinate position in the relations of production and how their resistance is confined by consumerism and their ideas about gender. I will now illustrate how the "Indian" is employed as a symbol through which The Boys establish their own moral worth and their difference from the perceived dominant power bloc. They "imagine" their own community in opposition to others (Anderson 1984:15) and ethnicity provides easily discernable markers upon which such divisions can be constituted.

Berkhofer, in his study of the image of the Indian in white culture, points out the ideological nature of the term "Indian."

Since the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere neither called themselves by a single term nor understood themselves as a collectivity, the idea and image of the Indian must be a white conception. Native Americans were and are real, but the Indian was a white invention and still remains largely a white image, if not stereotype (Berkhofer 1979:3).

For The Boys, and for many white people in Thunder Bay

and in Northwestern Ontario as a whole, the most important ethnic distinction today is between Whites and Indians. The Indian is perceived as an inferior other against whom Whites define themselves. The Indian is also a powerful symbol in the Whites' understanding of their relationship to other Whites, especially to the metropolis located in the southern part of the province. The Indian thus plays a symbolic role in two sets of relationships, one between local Whites and local Natives, and the other between local Whites and other Whites. Ironically, Natives, who clearly are at the bottom of the local social hierarchy in both material and ideological terms, have become symbols of the domination of local Whites by the external White power bloc. The Indian is both the object of derision and the object of envy for the local Whites. The least powerful segment of local society has come to represent local White powerlessness. The Whites' understanding of their own subordinate position in the broader society is refracted into a racist perspective against Native people.

#### 4.2. Ethnicity Among People of European Ancestry in Thunder Bay

Today ethnicity is not a significant social marker between people of European ancestry in Thunder Bay. But in the recent past a person's ethnic affiliation often denoted a place in the hierarchies of occupation, residence and social class. The working class was fractured along ethnic



lines and the division of labour between industries was to a large extent based on ethnicity. The popular local version of this historic situation goes as follows: The railroad was an English preserve; Finns and French Canadians composed a large portion of the labour force in the forest industry, construction work was an Italian activity; and Eastern Europeans worked the freight sheds and performed other kinds of heavy manual work.

This characterization of the ethnic division of labour reflects the stereotypes that are held about different ethnic groups as much as it describes the actual historical situation. Not all Finns and French Canadians were lumberjacks and there were British unskilled labourers in the freight sheds alongside Italians and Ukrainians. Nonetheless, ethnicity was a significant factor in the social, economic and political divisions in the city and within the working class.

In 1913, the Department of Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church and the Board of Social Service and Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church directed a "Preliminary and General Social Survey" of Fort William and Port Arthur. The moral and religious life of non-Anglo Saxon immigrants was of central concern to officials of both churches. Of Fort William the report states:

There may be said to be three distinct grades of society: The more well-to-do, living in the better residential quarters, who have made a competence from real-estate investments; the

Artisan class consisting mainly of English-speaking people, who have come to provide the skilled labour for the City's numerous industries; and the ever-increasing horde of unskilled workers: Ruthenians, Russians, Italians, and many others who do the railway construction work and the rough labour and freight handling about the factories and docks (Stewart 1913a:10).

In Port Arthur "the steady encroachment of the immigrant people [was] not so marked" but the life of the city was said to have "a decidedly Finnish cast" (Stewart 1913b:5).

Like Fort William, the population readily falls into 3 classes: The wealthy class of early settlers, who have grown up in the City, and the business and professional men; the Artisans or skilled labor class; the non-English-speaking immigrant population, among whom the Finns constitute the aristocracy, and are the link connecting the immigrant with the Artisan class (Stewart 1913b:5).

In the decade 1901-1911 the population of Thunder Bay District increased by 252 percent, the second highest expansion in the country (Canada, 1931 vol. 1:124). The bulk of this population explosion was the result of immigration which included large numbers of people from eastern and southern Europe. In 1911 over 24 percent of the population was born in "foreign countries", meaning for the most part continental Europe, since only three percent of the foreign born came from the United States (Canada 1951 vol.1: table 9-8). The social survey directed by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches in 1913 stated on the basis of official statistics that one-third of the population was neither Canadian, English, Irish, Scottish or American. The author of the report did not trust these

figures: "We have no doubt that there is a far greater proportion of non-Anglo-Saxons" (Stewart 1913a:7). Evidence to support this statement came from a house-by-house survey conducted on two blocks of the coal-docks section and one block in Westfort, both areas where immigrants lived.

Census data for Port Arthur reveals a similar pattern. More than 22 percent of the population was born in "foreign countries." Indeed, in 1911 Fort William and Port Arthur had the greatest percentage of "foreign born" of the 65 Canadian cities with populations greater than 10,000 (Canada 1951 vol.1:table 9-8).

For the self-appointed guardians of community morality the presence of these foreigners was a grave concern. It appeared that they lived and worked within their own communities and were therefore immune to the influences of Canadian life. Children were taught English in school but adults had little contact with the larger environment. In Fort William the,

social, political and industrial forces in the community are having little force in the Canadianization of these peoples in as far as the adults are concerned at least.... They attend their own churches.... They have their own societies and their own social gatherings. The English papers scarcely reach them at all, such reading as they do generally being in their own native papers. In the industries, they work in their own national groups to a very great extent, this being true of the foundries and all the railroad construction work, so that they come into little contact with Canadian life (Stewart 1913a:8).

A similar situation prevailed in Port Arthur.

The immigrants to a certain extent form a City within a City. They are not reached by the English Canadian papers to any appreciable extent, and very few of them speak English.... Several of the immigrants have their own churches, and these to a considerable degree prevent their Canadianization.... There are different national societies among them, and the Finns have their socialist society, and these serve to perpetuate old world conditions in a New Ontario City. The Industrial associations do not serve to Canadianize to any marked degree because the immigrants work in groups and even in industry maintain a life of their own (Stewart 1913b:4).

In the years prior to World War One, "foreigners" played a leading role in a series of violent strikes and demonstrations against the railroad companies (Morrison 1974, 1976). The companies were able to exploit ethnic divisions among workers to break the strikes and prevent the formation of unions. Local newspapers focused on the danger to the Anglo-Saxon community and to British values posed by large numbers of unassimilated immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. They drew a strong connection between the use of violence and the immigrants, and played upon the fears of the local Anglo-Saxon community (MacDonald 1976). Not only were the newcomers not acculturated to peaceful labour tactics such as those practised by British trade unionists, they brought "dangerous" socialist ideas with them from their homelands.

The Finns and eastern Europeans came from the Tsarist and Austro-Hungarian empires. Many of the Finns had come to Canada in the wake of the failed 1905 revolution, while others, who were social democrats and fought with the Reds

after the 1917 revolution, had to leave when the Whites won the post-revolution civil war in Finland. Finns were very active in both the national and local socialist and communist movements. One of the stated goals of The Finnish Organization of Canada was the furtherance of the labour movement as a whole. It was outlawed by the Canadian government in 1940 (Pilli 1981, Eklund 1981, Radforth 1981). Many Ukrainians were also active in the local labour movement and built a Labour Temple in the east end of Fort William in 1928. Although Italians and Greeks did play an important part in the labour "troubles" in Fort William and Port Arthur and were victims of anti-immigrant fears throughout the country, socialist politics do not seem to have been as central a feature of their culture (Pucci 1978).

Although the subject is largely unresearched, it appears ethnicity has declined as a source of social division among people of European ancestry. The major influx of non-British European immigrants took place prior to the second world war. The offspring born to the early waves of immigrants were educated in Canada and socialized into the predominant culture. For groups like the Finns, integration began in the interwar years (Tolvanen 1981). They were able to move into more skilled jobs and out of the Finnish ghetto.

The elevators had been a Scottish preserve in the early

years of their existence. By the mid-1970s this was no longer the case. In the grain elevator where I worked in 1974-75, a wide spectrum of ethnic groups were represented. Of the 18 workers in the track shed, there were six British, two Finns, two French Canadians, two Ukrainians, two Italians, one Pole, one Dane, one Native (Mohawk), and one person who always claimed not to know his ethnic heritage. The foreman and supervisor were British, and the elevator superintendent was Greek.<sup>1</sup>

Ethnicity among Whites is important to The Boys only as a source of jokes, and these are endless. Jokes about Finns revolve around the idea that they drink a lot. Eastern Europeans are the butt of jokes about their supposed lack of intelligence. Italians are stereotyped as extremely emotional. I never heard a joke in which British heritage was important.

The Boys are descended from a number of different European ethnic groups. They continuously joked with one another about such things, but ethnicity was not considered an issue important enough to disqualify someone from group membership. European ethnicity does not play a role in their selection of female companions. The Boys who are not of British descent are "name" ethnics, to employ Stymeist's (1975:54) terminology, and their ethnic heritage carries

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<sup>1</sup> The entire elevator and malt plant employed approximately 100 people.

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little social significance, at least in terms of employment, class or social status.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.3. The Image of the Indian in Contemporary Thunder Bay

Ethnicity is not, however, a non-issue in contemporary Thunder Bay. Native people are the one group for whom ethnic ancestry is a stigma with important social ramifications. The image of the Indian which appears most frequently in the The Boys' discourse is generally derogatory. In jokes, offhand comments, and general banter and gossip, the Indian stands for negative personality traits. An individual is often denigrated by the suggestion that only Indians find him or her attractive. Behaviour considered outrageous is referred to as "going Indian". This involves a variety of activities -- excessive drinking, fighting, vandalism or just conducting oneself in a rude or obnoxious manner. The idea of the Indian as the living embodiment of pathological behaviour characteristics is never far from the surface of the mind or the tip of the tongue. A story about a rude drunk in a public place

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2 "At one end of the scale are the 'core' ethnics, people who possess and act out the cultural stuff of their origins a fair percentage of the time. Most core ethnics are older people. Next there are the 'peripheral' ethnics, those who may be familiar with the language and customs of an ethnic category, but seldom if ever use them. This is the archetypal second generation. Finally, there are the 'name' ethnics, people who are regarded as having an ethnic dimension simply because their ancestors are or are assumed to have been 'ethnics' (Stymeist 1975:54).

automatically generates a comment such as "an Indian, eh?" Misbehaviour on the part of a group of high school students is summarily explained with the observation "that they were probably all Indians". Vandalism of new cars in an automobile sales lot is accounted for by the "fact" that "lots of Indians live around there." These are just a few of a vast repertoire of behaviours which are considered typical of Indians.

In the preceding chapter I referred to the destruction of the baseball diamond where The Boys play, and their conviction that Indians were responsible for it. It was, for them, so obvious as to be beyond doubt. I personally do not know who was responsible, but it does not matter; we are dealing with a discourse which produces "truth effects."<sup>3</sup> The reserve is nearby; the Indians were angry because they did not have a team in the league; and, this was the sort of thing Indians would do. No one was caught, but everyone was convinced they knew who was responsible. Once, when discussing the vandalism, one of The Boys suggested a 40-ounce bottle of whisky be left at the diamond every weekend.

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<sup>3</sup> "The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to make use of for three reasons. The first is that like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity, or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false" (Foucault 1980:118).



"When they see that they'll get so excited, they'll drink it and pass out. Then we won't have to worry."

The "obviousness" of the evidence was predetermined by the stereotypes about Indians which are central to the Boys' culture. In this case there were other possible explanations of the vandalism. There is a trailer court nearby; the diamond is very close to the city and is easily accessible by car; the local Band was approached about entering a team in the league but showed no interest -- none of these facts in any way threatened the "obviousness" of the explanation that was adopted by those who played in the league. On the contrary, the explanation became the centre of a new set of sarcastic comments. Arriving at the diamond on Monday evening it was discovered the bleachers had been burned. The team reckoned the Indians had a barbecue on the weekend.

The vandalism of the baseball field was and is an issue of endless commentary for the informal group. My own skepticism about their explanation of it was a portentous sign of my own difference. Critical comments on the subject initiated an uncomfortable silence at the table, a change of topic -- signs a "non-believer" was in their midst.

Indians are the one ethnic group The Boys try to avoid interaction with. "Indian bars", drinking establishments with a large Native clientele, were avoided. The presence of Indians was explicitly stated as the reason for not

patronizing these establishments.

There's no way I'm going in [a well known "Indian bar"]. Some buck [a young Indian man] is liable to stick a knife in my back. People are always getting stabbed there.

You have to be tough to hang around Moccassin Square Gardens [the local nickname for another bar frequented by Natives]. You're going to wake up on the railroad tracks with all your money gone [i.e. one is likely to get beat up and robbed].

I visited the "Indian bars" on average once a week during the first year of my fieldwork. Several of The Boys warned me that this was not a wise thing to do. They told me that a "squaw" was going to try and pick me up and "then the whole tribe is going to be out to get you". One of them said, laughingly, that I must like my meat smoked, a suggestion that I was interested in Native women as sexual partners. Whites who frequent "Indian bars" are considered to be "losers".

Native women were the only women with whom The Boys would not mix. People who lived with or married Natives were thought to be "hard up", that is incapable of having a relationship with a White. A mixed Native/White couple is inevitably the subject of gossip. Native women are perceived to be "easy" or "loose". They as a group fall into the whore category of the "madonna/whore" dichotomy. If someone goes "slumming" one evening they might "pick up" a "squaw", but long-term relationships with Native women are never contemplated.

People were very willing to talk about Indians. The

following conversation is typical of many I had. It took place in a bar on a cold night in January 1985.

Six of us went for beer after playing "boot hockey" on an outdoor rink. We met a couple of other friends at the bar. In the course of conversation the topic of Indians came up and I pursued the chance to question The Boys who were present about their attitudes. Fred, a forest firefighter, was more than happy to give me his opinion on Indians, "So you want to hear about Indians," he said.

Fred was vehement. "Up at Cat Lake, an Indian never cuts more than one day's worth of firewood. You want to know why? If he cuts any more than what he needs everybody else comes and takes it. That's the way Indians are. There are no laws up there. If you have trouble with someone you get your gun. That's the way they do it."

I, unwisely, interrupted at this point and said, "maybe it's just reciprocity."

- "What the fuck is that?"

- "Maybe what you call stealing is really sharing. The guy who comes and takes the wood is a brother or relative of some kind, and the fellow who cut the firewood takes something from him at another time."

- "Maybe," Fred replied, "but we give them too much. Up at Cat Lake there is a brand-new community centre built with a Wintario (a provincial lottery) grant. It cost about \$300,000. It's only worth \$100,000 but it is so expensive

to ship everything up there. Well you should see it now. All the windows are broken. There are shotgun blasts through the ceiling. And right on the door there is this big sign: 'This project was undertaken with a grant from Wintario.' Fuck, it's like that everywhere. Go up to Gull Bay. Everything is new. They're driving Cadillacs."

Again I interjected. "I doubt they were given a Wintario grant to buy Cadillacs."

Sam, the other fire-fighter, commented at this point. "I think it's just that we give them too much. Things they don't want. They just want to be left alone. They like how they live."

Fred again: "Anyway, it's not White attitudes about Indians. What about what they think of us. They're [the government] building a new runway at Cat Lake for their health services. Not one Indian works on the project. It's all White guys. They live in brand-new trailers. They got a satellite dish. Everything is new. The Indians hate those fuckers, man [giving the sign of the finger as he says this]. But they [the Indians] don't care. The fucking lakes up there are dead. The commercial fishermen have killed them. There is a lake about 100 miles [165 kilometres] north of Sioux Lookout [i.e. it is isolated] and there is not a fucking fish in it."

At this point Fred stands up and walks to the washroom shaking his head. Apparently, the conversation upset him,

for he doesn't come back to our table, but goes and sits at the bar with some other friends who are watching a television tuned to a rock video channel.

Sam speaks up again: "They speak another language, you know. You should see when you work with them on a fire. I'm the white guy, the boss. You ask them to do something and they smile at you. Then they start talking in their own language. They do the work, but you always get the feeling really they're saying to each other, fuck you pal. I don't know. Maybe it's just the language."

Fred returns. Standing over the table, he says, "Don't get me wrong, eh. There are lots of good Indians. Right now I've got four young Indian guys on my crew. They're the best workers there. It's like when they're off the reserve working a fire or something they're okay, you know. I work with Indians all the time and they're great. The smoke and bugs and shit like that doesn't bother them. Not like white guys. But when they go back to the reserve they get all fucked up."

A brief silence settled over the table. The conversation made everyone a little ill at ease. A seemingly happy way out of the impasse appeared a few minutes later when a high-school friend whom I had not seen for years arrived.

This conversation contains a number of themes which repeatedly surfaced in conversations about Indians. It is

important then to isolate these themes and identify the subtext.

The idea that Indians have no laws is very common. Fred forthrightly states this, as very frequently did others.

I think they're just like animals sometimes. They're always fighting or killing each other. It seems a week doesn't go by when you don't read about another one dying from alcohol or a girl being raped. You go out to the reserve, they have new houses, but the yards are full of broken cars and equipment. They don't like living in civilization. I guess it's just hard for them to obey laws and things like that. (A retired elevator employee).

I feel sorry for them. You know, they come to town and they don't know how to behave themselves. They learn, but I guess like they don't have many rules out in the bush, so how would they know any better? (One of The Boys).

There are some really nice Indians and it must be hard for them because if they try to do something for themselves the rest of the tribe just takes it from them. I guess it's just every man for himself so if they like something they just take it. (A plumber, approximately 38 years old).

You see the kids downtown all the time. They were never taught right from wrong so they're always getting into trouble. (One of The Boys).

The idea that Indians do not have laws or rules is consonant with the European tradition of juxtaposing White civilization, which is defined by the rule of law, to the state of savagery where there is no law. Implicit in the statement, "there are no laws up there," is the notion that there are laws "down here," that is to say in White society and, more specifically, in Thunder Bay.

Related to the image of lawless Indians is the idea that Indians do not respect possessions. In the conversation reported above, the empirical referent is the new community centre. Literally everyone I spoke to in Thunder Bay can recite an example of Indians not taking proper care of their belongings. Old beat-up, rusting cars are referred to as Indian cars. The condition of houses and yards on the local reserve is a very significant indicator of the Indians' supposed lack of respect for property. The Boys' theory about vandalism at the baseball diamond reflects the same idea. Stories abound of houses being torn apart by the inhabitants for firewood.

For The Boys, respectability is rooted in the notions of personal cleanliness and care of possessions. Noble poor people are clean and keep their homes or apartments neat. The degree of civility is equated with the level of appreciation and respect for possessions and property. Indians are thought to have very little of these two qualities and are, therefore, perceived to be different from and inferior to Whites.

In the conversation described above both speakers asserted that Indians do not like Whites. This idea is very common, and it does not preclude the assumption that there are valid reasons why Indians are hostile towards Whites. But there is another connotation to this theme -- racism is not restricted to Whites. The Boys and local people

generally are very sensitive to how they are stereotyped by outsiders. They sense that people who are not locals are quick to label them as racist. In this sense, there is a defensiveness to their claim that Indians are just as hostile to Whites as Whites are to Indians.

Another theme in the above conversation is that the environment can no longer support traditional Native culture. Again, the speaker has a particular example in mind but the overall notion is consistent with the long-standing image of Indian culture as dead, or at least in the process of dying. This idea has been part of white thought about Indians for centuries.

It is important to recognize that the death of the environment in this conversation is attributed to commercial fishermen. It is incorrect to assert, as is often done, that whites, conceived as some homogeneous group, perceive of the environment as something to be conquered and used, and oppose this to the Native tradition in which there is a belief in the importance of reciprocal relations between man and the environment. The working class as a whole in a region such as Northwestern Ontario has a very ambiguous relationship to the environment. They are dependent upon its exploitation for employment, but there is also recognition, at least at the level of official labour institutions, that ecologically unsound management of resources is not in labour's long-term interest (Davis and



Saunders 1979).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the environment is an important leisure resource for many people in the region. Sport fishing and hunting are popular. The environment and the practices of industry are a very "hot" topic in the region. While there is a radical difference between the perception of the environment in Native culture and economy and the manner in which it is treated in the industrial economy and culture, it is simplistic to assume that all segments of the White population subscribe to the same view. The Boys have a strong conviction that the big corporations are environmentally irresponsible and that business is not concerned with the environment.

Thus, traditional Indian culture is perceived to be dying or dead, but this is seen as the outcome of commercial forces over which Indians have no control. The Boys often conceive of themselves as victims of large corporations.

Another theme in the conversation is that not all Indians are bad. At one level this can be read straightforwardly as a recognition of individual differences among Indians. The Boys are not dyed-in-the-wool racists with a developed theory of White superiority. As I have already stated, though, they are very sensitive about being stereotyped as such, and thus are quick to proclaim their innocence in these matters.

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<sup>4</sup> For another critical review of the forest industry produced in Thunder Bay see Lakehead Social Planning Council (1981).

Yet there is a sub-text to this assertion. It is a phrase uttered in virtually every conversation I had about Indians over two years, and the imagery in most of these conversations is very negative. Statements such as "I don't hate Indians," "I have some good friends who are Indians" or "I think Indians are all right really" start to ring false when they are preceded or followed by a litany of negative comments.

Another common theme is that Indians are able to live normally as long as they are in the bush. Once they leave the bush (nature) and go the reserves (civilization) they have trouble.

The most frequent complaint about Indians is that they have special privileges, i.e. they receive more than their fair share of government money. In the conversation cited above, one of the speakers says that "we give them too much." The "we" in this context is the state, and, as will be shown, local whites have a very critical opinion about their relationship to the state. "We" in this context also means the taxpayer. The idea that Indians are the recipients of government largesse is the other side of the idea that no one gives The Boys anything, or to put it another way, "we" taxpayers give but we do not receive. Sam introduced a slightly more critical version of this theme when he said, "I think it is just that we give them too much. Things they don't want. They just want to be left

alone. They like how they live." The sub-text in this statement is that the bureaucrats who are responsible for Indians are not aware of the real situation.

There is some ambiguity in the way the Indian is represented in the discourse of The Boys. The same can be said of the moral and ethical valuation which accompanies the different elements in the imagery. The themes of the conversation discussed above are bound up with at least six basic categories in the imagery of Indians, each of which relates in some way to other elements in the local working-class culture and fixes Indians in a moral and social hierarchy.

First, there is the noble savage: honest to a fault, hard working, physically tough, able to compete successfully with nature on its own terms, intelligent and skilled in practical matters. Secondly, there is the backward simpleton. the poor sod, who try as he might, is incapable of improving himself. Thirdly, there is the Indian as victim of external forces. These three aspects of the white image of the Indian can be juxtaposed to the fourth category -- the degenerate, uncivilized Indian, who has no morality, and is not concerned to develop it -- and the fifth category, the welfare bum -- lazy, living off other people's labour. As I have said, the Indian as welfare bum is a very important symbol today and I will discuss later its articulation to a more explicitly political discourse.

Finally, there is a sixth category reserved for Native women. On the one hand, they are degenerate. They are represented as "easy" in sexual terms. On the other hand, they are seen as victims of the degenerate male Indian. Indeed, the negative appraisal of gender relations within the Native population contributes to the image of the degenerate uncivilized Indian male.

These six categories are assessed in ethical and social terms on the basis of their relation to other cultural values of The Boys. The noble savage is good in ethical terms and socially an equal or even superior. Practical knowledge and skill, physical toughness, an ability to deal with nature, and dependability are all highly valued by The Boys. Dependability is particularly important because it is an aspect of The Boys' understanding of reciprocity. A good man is someone who can be relied on to contribute his share to the collective good.

The second category, the backward uncivilized savage, is morally ambiguous. It is easily related to the importance of fate in working-class culture. The uncivilized savage is to be pitied as much as disliked; fate has dealt him a cruel blow. However, The Boys take a paternalistic stance against a person who they perceive as socially inferior.

The Indian as victim is a positive moral image in which the person is a social equal. This conception is arrived at

on the basis of what the Indian is not -- not of the power bloc, not of the dominant external forces. As I will discuss below, for The Boys and many other Whites in Northwestern Ontario this is a distinction central to their self-identity.

The degenerate Indian is, of course, valued negatively in ethical terms and is perceived as a social inferior. Whereas the Indian as victim and Indian as the backward simpleton are perceived as victims of forces over which they have no control, the degenerate Indian is seen as responsible for his own situation, or is thought to be too weak physically and morally to deal with his situation. The working-class men whom I know are very proud of their ability to "put up with things". As I discussed in Chapter Two, they see their work as a sacrifice for the good of their family or future family. Individuals who "can't handle it" (that is, hold down a job) are scorned.

The Indian as welfare bum is a version of the degenerate-Indian theme. He is seen to have taken advantage of the system and therefore as having broken the cycle of reciprocity which is the ideal form of social exchange in The Boys' culture.

Finally the image of Native women constitutes them as social inferiors, consonant with the perception of all women in this culture. As easy sexual targets they are assessed negatively in terms of morality. As victims of degenerate

male Indians they are viewed paternalistically.

#### 4.4. The Indian as a Symbol of the Relation Between the Metropolis and the Hinterland

The Indian is not only an image against which local Whites define themselves. It is also an important symbol in their understanding of the hinterland/metropolis relationship between the region and the centre of political and economic power in the south. Landsman (1985) has analyzed how Indians become symbols in struggles between the White population in a hinterland region and the White population in the metropolis. In upper New York state the Whites perceive the Indians as the subjects of media attention and liberal politicians located in the south. For them Indians symbolize their own alienation from the southern-based sources of political and economic power.

A major component of the interpretive framework held by Whites is the view of the Indians as a minority group, and thus as another cause of bleeding-heart downstate liberals. It was believed by Whites in both areas that the Indians were able to get what they wanted from the state in large part because they were able to dupe the downstate urban press (Landsman 1985: 829).

This view is reflected in attitudes towards Indians expressed by Whites in Northwestern Ontario. The "Indian problem" is widely perceived to be the invention of Whites who do not live in the region. The statement made in the conversation reported above, that "we give them too much" and that often they do not want what is given reflects this

idea.

The Indian as a symbol in the interpretation of the relationship between local Whites and the southern-based power bloc was forcefully expressed in an infamous booklet produced in a town in Northwestern Ontario. In the summer of 1974 the Ojibwa Warrior Society occupied Anicinabe Park in the town of Kenora. The aim of this action was to dramatize the Native's claim to the park, and to draw attention to the deplorable condition of the Native population of the area. The reaction of many of the local Whites was extremely harsh. One town resident produced a pamphlet which gained a good deal of notoriety.

The primary message of the pamphlet, tellingly entitled *Bended Elbow*, is simple and familiar. The Indians' problems stem from their own lifestyle, particularly alcohol abuse. Moreover, the government's treatment of them was too generous and lenient, tendencies which only encouraged the Indians' supposedly slovenly habits. The leaders of the occupation were, in the opinion of the author, a few troublemakers and outsiders with connections to various international communist groups. "I don't know of any Indian living in this area who is complaining. The ones who are complaining are a few white radicals and members of the Ojibwa Warrior Society" (Jacobson 1974:11).

The pamphlet reveals far more than the racist attitudes of its author, however. The symbolic meaning of the

occupation of Anicinabe Park for the local Whites can only be grasped within the context of conflicts within White society. The manner in which the government and media responded to the occupation were for the locals a further indication of their own alienation from the State and the South in general. The author says: "The illegal occupation goes into its fourth week, thanks to the support and encouragement of the news media given to these Indian agitators and their tactics." Moreover: "The crux of the matter is, as usual, the government. The white collar man down in Toronto or Ottawa has no idea of what goes on in the north and for that matter, doesn't seem to care" (Jacobson 1974:12).

As in Upper New York State, the local White population believes there is a dual system of justice and welfare. The Indians are believed to have a host of government services and benefits available to them which the Whites do not, as these excerpts from the pamphlet indicate.

I ask you reader who is being discriminated against? Nobody is building me a house and furnishing it; nobody is building you a house and furnishing it (Jacobson 1974:6).

Education wise now an Indian boy or girl can go all the way to the top. They can be Doctors, or Nurses or anything they want to be and get paid an allowance while doing so. While the poor taxpayers can't afford to send their children to university because they have to pay the whole shot and that cost [sic] a hell of a lot (Jacobson 1974:32).

You blame the Indian Affairs for their Indian policies. Well then let's abolish Indian Affairs.



That's our tax dollars -- not yours. Let's see you work for a living and to build and buy your own homes and pay for your own education. After all you don't have to accept anything from the government. I'm sure they won't mind. As to speaking out for the Indians. Why should we? Nobody speaks out for us' If we have a problem we can't even go to the "White Man's Affairs" for help -- there is none. If you want equality, seriously, then cut your ties with government and their juicy grants and fine houses -- step out into reality from your dream world. Pick up your load and walk with us for a mile . . . . The grass isn't any greener over here you know (Jacobson 1974:7).

It is asserted the authorities do not apply the law to Indians in the same manner they do to Whites. The pamphlet consists to a large extent of a list of irresponsible and illegal habits of Indians, which the author claims the state does not prosecute. "It is a known fact that up until now, we have [sic] two sets of laws in Canada. One for the rich and one for the poor. Now there are three, because now there is a law for the Indians, which is no law at all" (Jacobson 1974:24).

These arguments are positioned in the local culture through the author's style of thought and writing. Just as my informants when questioned about their attitudes toward Indians inverted the problem and posed the issue in terms of Indian attitudes about Whites, on the inside front cover of Bended Elbow is the following statement: "The Indians refer to the taxpayer as the 'whiteman.' When in reality all taxpayers are not 'white'. So the phrase 'whiteman' in this book is Indian slang for taxpayer." Perhaps the single most

important stylistic feature of the pamphlet with regard to its ability to articulate an entire cultural mode of thought is the use of the vernacular. The author defiantly proclaims her difference from those responsible for the perceived pro-Indian publicity: "The language in this article will not be nice. I believe in calling a spade a spade . . . . I want to tell everyone that is reading this book that I am no author. The English may even be poor" (Jacobson 1974:1).

To employ Althusser's terminology, the fact that the article is written in the vernacular interpellates the reader and is the foundation of the recognition by the reader of him or herself in the author. The style is part of the system of oppositions around which the working-class culture and the sense of regionalism are constituted. The distinction between the plain language of the pamphlet and the literary language of the intellectual also reflects a series of other dichotomies important in the local constitution of self-worth: the difference between mental and manual labour, commonsense versus theory, the doer versus the thinker -- all of which correspond to the local/outsider, northern/southerner, and even exploited/exploiter dichotomies.

The idea that the Indians are a celebrated cause of intellectuals and other liberals from outside the region is often stated by The Boys. When it became clear that my own

opinions were more sympathetic to the Indian cause than their own, one of The Boys said, "Well, you've been to university and that's how you people think, but if you actually lived up here and saw what I saw, you would understand."

#### 4.5. The Meaning of the Local Image of the Indian

In line with the argument that social being determines social consciousness, materialist analyses of White ideas about Indians assert that these ideas are the result of objective historical conditions. Elias (1975), in his discussion of Native-White relations in Churchill, Manitoba, sees negative White attitudes towards Natives as a reflection of the metropolis/hinterland relationship between the South and the North. Natives inhabit the northern hinterland which the southern metropolis seeks to exploit. Whites in the North represent metropolitan interests and negative White attitudes towards Native people are the manifestation and vehicle of metropolitan dominance over the hinterland.

Such an analysis is inappropriate in the present case because the local Whites, at least the local White working class, are not the local representatives of metropolitan interests. They clearly perceive themselves as part of the hinterland. The feeling of alienation from the South is a fundamental feature of the identity of the Whites who

inhabit Northwestern Ontario. According to Miller (1985:228) "the feeling of belonging to an exploited hinterland is almost universal" throughout Northern Ontario. Stymeist says that in "Crow Lake", a town approximately 300 kilometres northwest of Thunder Bay, Southerners "are seen collectively as the exploiters of the North, as the people who take wealth out of the North but fail to improve significantly the northern standard of living" (1975:26). The long-awaited report of the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment echoes these sentiments:

Many northerners still consider that the north has become an economic colony of the south, receiving an insufficient share of the benefits of development while bearing most of the adverse impacts. They feel that they have little control over shaping their own destinies and lack power to significantly influence decisions about development made in corporate and government boardrooms elsewhere (Ontario 1985:10-11).

The sense of alienation from the South is expressed in negative stereotypes Northerners hold about the South. Stymeist reports that "southerners -- both Canadian and American -- may be regarded with a certain amount of disdain. They are seen as variously being soft, pretentious and ignorant of the land and water" (1975:26). The Boys also hold negative images of Southerners. They are perceived to be ignorant of the region's problems. Tourists and sport hunters and fishermen from the U.S. and southern Canada are the butt of endless jokes which revolve around the contradiction between their wealth as expressed in the

large amounts of expensive equipment they are perceived to own and their practical incompetence which prevents them from utilizing it appropriately. The fact that southern sport hunters and fishermen seem to need many expensive comforts when they go hunting and fishing is read as a sign that they are "soft" and unable to withstand the rigours of the climate and environment. Such ideas contain both envy and derision. In so far as the region is relatively distant from the seat of government and is an area of resource extraction, such characterizations do reflect Northerners' consciousness of the metropolis/hinterland relationship which exists between the South and the North.<sup>5</sup>

The South is also seen as an area torn by crime and pollution. The Boys and many others continuously contrast the virtues of Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario with the vices of the South. The South is too fast, too dirty, too crowded, too noisy, and too dangerous; the cities are too large and contain too many "weird" people. There are countless stories of people who have moved to Northwestern Ontario from the southern part of the province and who "won't go back for anything", and other tales of local people who were transferred "down South" or moved voluntarily who "just can't wait to come back."

Interestingly, the romantic image of the North and its

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<sup>5</sup> See Weller (1977) for an application of the hinterland/metropolis model to the politics of Northwestern Ontario.

people employed by residents of Northwestern Ontario to define themselves vis-à-vis the South is itself a southern product. It is a reflection of the frontier mythology which has been an important element in White North American culture. H.V. Nelles has summarized the image of Northern Ontario in southern newspapers in the 1890s, when the government was pushing to develop its industrial frontier.

If the land was innately promising the climate would guarantee the energy and intelligence required to realize that promise. For, it was commonly thought, the sharp geographical and climatic contrasts of the northern environment bred hardy, red-cheeked, self-reliant men, through whose bodies coursed a warming intelligence and vigour, and an abiding love of Anglo-Saxon liberty (Nelles 1974:55).

In the minds of many residents of Northwestern Ontario such imagery is a means of symbolically inverting the material relationship which exists between North and South. The North may be subordinate to the South in economic and political terms but in moral and physical terms Northerners are superior to Southerners.

To use Laclau's (1979) terminology in the present historical conjuncture of Northwestern Ontario, "the people"/"power bloc" distinction is expressed in terms of a North/South dichotomy. In cultural and ideological terms, The Boys' discourses based on class and those based on region are mutually reinforcing.

Given the strong consciousness of region among Whites in Northwestern Ontario, it is difficult to interpret local

White attitudes toward Natives as an expression of metropolitan dominance of the region. The northern part of Ontario is an industrial frontier. The possessive individualism that often develops in an agrarian frontier has been subordinated throughout Northern Ontario to a tradition of Crown ownership of the forests and minerals. In Ontario the state has always played an active role in the development of the staple products of the industrial frontier, but this did not mean it pursued socialist goals. Rather the policies of the government reflected the concerns and needs of the southern business community.<sup>6</sup> The bulk of the White population was and is working class as opposed to the pattern, say, on the prairies where independent White farmers settled the region.

David Stymeist (1975) has employed another kind of materialist argument to analyze relations between Natives and non-Natives in Crow Lake. He argues that White prejudice against Natives reflects the present structural position of Natives in Crow Lake and is the result of historical and contemporary structural factors. Most important is a process of informal exclusion which insures that Natives do not learn of opportunities in areas such as employment and housing. Moreover, the town has become heavily dependent on the services aimed at the impoverished Native population in the region as a source of employment.

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<sup>6</sup> This thesis is further developed in Nelles (1974).

As much as a third of the employment in Crow Lake is directly related to the provision of social services for Native people. Thus,

The prejudice against Native people in Crow Lake is directly related to this economic complex, although the people of the town are not generally aware of the intricacies of the economic exchange that operates with reference to Indians. ... The creation of adverse ethnic stereotypes follows, and ethnicity, as it applies to the Native/non-Native distinction in Crow Lake, provides a logic for stratification (Stymeist 1975:92).

In other words, ethnic prejudice represents and rationalizes the economic dominance of non-Natives over Natives.

In a region such as Northwestern Ontario, however, the local white population has little control over the volume or kind of services that either the provincial or federal governments provide for Natives. These are the result of decisions made in Toronto or Ottawa. Often the professionals who staff social service institutions are from outside the region (Stymeist 1975:37). Weller has pointed out, for example, that

a high proportion of the local elite [throughout Northwestern Ontario] is comprised of people from outside the region working for the larger companies, government, or in the professions. They often do not stay very long and do not have much identification with the region and its aspirations ... (Weller 1977:736).

Moreover, whatever economic benefits accrue to the Whites because of the provision of services to Native people, the Whites are acutely aware of the fact that these services are paid for by their taxes. David Stymeist, illustrates that



the White population perceives the Indians as an economic burden, rather than as a source of wealth. This is very evident in 'The Boys' own thinking and in Bended Elbow. Given this widespread opinion, one would expect the locals to be against the provision of social and health services to Natives. Stymeist himself states that "the people of the town are not generally aware of the intricacies of the economic exchange that operates with reference to Indians" (Stymeist 1975:92). Yet he still, illogically, asserts that negative attitudes towards Natives are rooted in the fact that Whites benefit from the presence of an impoverished Native population. In any event, Stymeist's argument does not explain prejudice among those not employed in the sector of the economy geared towards the provision of social services for Natives.

In the case of The Boys and as is clearly expressed in Bended Elbow, the negative attitudes about Indians are closely bound up with the idea that they are dependent on the welfare state. The state, it is thought, gives Indians too much. Indians are perceived to have special rights and privileges. Self-reliance and reciprocity are important values within the culture of The Boys, and a heavy dependence upon welfare is contrary to these values.

Moreover, there is a structural basis to the working-class's low opinion of the poor.

In an indirect sense, the proletariat is exploited by all other categories with the exception of the

petite bourgeoisie. Workers and the petite bourgeoisie are the only producers of all that is consumed. The surplus produced by workers is directly and indirectly (through the state) transferred as revenue to all other categories. In this sense even the poorest of the lumpenproletariat lives off the workers: given capitalist relations of production there are objective bases to the antagonism of workers to the "welfare class" (Przeworski 1977:400).

Since Indians in Northwestern Ontario comprise a large and visible part of the "welfare class" the antagonism toward the poor is transferred onto Natives as a group. The scarce resource for which Whites feel they are in competition with Indians is the beneficence of the state. Competition between Whites and Natives in the region is over government largesse. In an ironic twist on Elias's analysis, Natives who are at the bottom of the local social hierarchy are seen by Whites as having an intimate relationship with metropolitan forces from which the Whites feel alienated.

Negative attitudes about Indians do not, however, only represent in ideological form a competition between Whites and Natives over resources. The local discourse about Indians is also consistent with a long European tradition in which Indians are employed as a symbol in the attempt to define a moral hierarchy and thus explain and justify the relations of power that exist in society at any given time. The position of a social group in these relations determines the way in which they use the symbol. Indeed, struggle over the meaning of symbols is a crucial aspect of class struggles in any social formation.

Images of Indians, whether derived from the themes of the noble or depraved savage, have been employed for a variety of purposes in the struggles within European and Euro-Canadian societies. The idea of the Wild Man and Woman can be traced back to the classical thought of the Greeks and Romans, and to pre-Christian Hebrew texts. As the Middle Ages drew to a close, when Europeans discovered what they called the New World, the Wild Man/Woman had acquired in European thought characteristics which reflected opposing attitudes towards society and nature.

If one looked upon nature as a horrible world of struggle, as animal nature, and society as a condition, which for all its shortcomings, was still preferable to the natural state, then he would continue to view the Wild Man as the antitype of the desirable humanity, as a warning of what men would fall into if they definitively rejected society and its norms. If, on the other hand, one took his vision of nature from the cultivated countryside, from what may be called herbal nature, and saw society, with all its struggle, as a fall away from natural perfection, then he might be inclined to populate that nature with wild men whose function was to serve as antitypes of social existence (White 1978:173).

Europeans brought this cognitive map and its association of meanings with them to the New World and placed the people they encountered into this pre-existing scheme (Berkhofer 1979:4). The myth of the Wild Man was extended into the spatial area of the New World. Images of the aboriginal people as either noble or depraved savages are examples of the same process whereby Europeans projected their own fears and desires onto others, and defined

themselves against these representations. Notions of civilization, for example, were formed against ideas about savagery, it being easier to identify what civilization is not, than to give the concept a specific positive content.

For the romantics and other critics either of the absolutist state in Europe, or later the ravages of the industrial revolution, the Indian was a symbol of man before the fall, physically handsome and robust, modest, dignified, brave yet tender, proud, independent and wholesome.

"According to this version, the Indian, in short, lived a life of liberty, simplicity and innocence" (Berkhofer 1979:28). The Indian embodied what critics of the present social order imagined as the virtues of a utopian past.

In contrast to the good Indian was the image of the Indian as depraved savage. The vision is wholly negative. Warlike, naked, vain, sexually promiscuous, brutal, cowardly, dirty, lazy, treacherous, thieving, superstitious -- these are the terms of the image of the bad Indian (Berkhofer 1979:28). Such characteristics were said to typify life outside the confines of European civilization.

These attitudes were mere extensions of longstanding European ideas about civilization and savagery to the aboriginal people of the New World. The latter had no voice in the construction of these images, and their actual lifestyles and cultures had relatively little impact upon the imagery. White interaction with Natives, however much

bound up with material interests, was heavily influenced by these ideological structures.

White colonial policies are the result of this fear of savagery and the need to "civilize" which follows from it, as well as crass economic interests. "Although some people may object to this claim, racism is undeniably the underlying ideology of the manifest policies regarding Native-White relations throughout the history of Canada" (Frideres 1983:2). In some cases, this fear and desire lead to the enactment of the most horrible cruelties on indigenous populations in the New World. The extermination of the Beothuck in Newfoundland, for example, cannot be explained in term of economic factors alone since the genocide was not necessary to achieve White domination. As has been suggested in the case of the horrors enacted against South American Indians, such phenomena represent an attempt by Europeans to exorcise the demons at the centre of their own cosmology by exterminating those onto whom those fears have been projected (Taussig 1987:3-135).

While the image of the noble savage generated more sympathetic behaviour on the part of Whites vis-a-vis Natives, the latter were still denied active participation in the construction of the imagery. The noble savage idea became most popular in Europe after the dominance of Whites in the New World was assured. Its fetishistic use was part of the attempt by the rising class of the bourgeoisie to

undermine the very concept of nobility in Europe (White 1978:191-195). Paternalism is often wrapped in a professed concern for the other, but does not necessarily involve a knowledge or acceptance of the other on his or her own terms.

In fact, what historians distinguish as high ideals and crass interests frequently combined in the past to justify specific policies, for ideals like interests derived from a larger intellectual and social context shared by the policy makers of a period or place. Moreover, what historians label good and bad motives or policies all too often produced like results for Native Americans (Berkhofer 1979:113-114).

The image of the noble savage was not only employed as a symbol of opposition in the criticism of Old-World political regimes. It was also used as an ideal against which the lower classes within European and Euro-Canadian society could be compared.

Biological determinism, the underpinning of modern racist theory, was and is a tool of legitimation for class as well as racial and ethnic social inequality. In the absolutist state, religion provided a model which explained and justified the social hierarchy. The doctrines of liberty and equality that were central ideological features of the bourgeois revolutions created a problem for the new dominant class when those revolutions were won. Freedom and liberty for all made great political rhetoric, and helped cement the alliances of the bourgeoisie, peasants, small farmers and workers against the aristocracy. But the

freedom that was intended by the ascendant bourgeoisie was freedom from inherited aristocratic privilege, freedom of investment and freedom to enjoy their private property. Certainly, political freedom in terms of universal suffrage, the abolition of slavery and debt bondage was not on their agenda. The political gains of the bourgeois revolutions are, of course, massively significant, but we must recognize the very limited sense in which the new dominant class wanted to apply the ideas upon which the revolutions were based (Lewontin, Rose and Kamin 1982:1-5).

The influence of the ideas of liberty and equality went far beyond the intentions of the bourgeoisie and it is in this context that the rise of biological determinism must be understood. By moving the argument away from the social and religious justifications for social inequality to the innate characteristics of individuals and social groups, social inequality could be explained as the result of a natural process, the product of an unalterable nature, rather than social, political and economic forces. Society could be said to be founded on principles of liberty and equality, and social inequality, exploitation and oppression in society explained and justified at the same time (Lewontin, Rose and Kamin 1982).

In the nineteenth century, concomitant with the industrial revolution, the new proletariat became the object of scorn and fear of both aristocratic and bourgeois

individuals. They were the "dangerous classes." The new "breed" of humanity was described in racist terminology. Here is how E.P. Thompson characterizes an "aristocratic traveller's" impression of the new industrial working population in 1792. They were "regarded with an alliterative hostility which betrays a response not far removed from that of the white racialist towards the coloured population today" (Thompson 1968:207). The fear which this new form of human being generated is captured by another observer of the English industrial revolution.

As a stranger passes through the masses of human beings which have accumulated round the mills and print works ... he cannot contemplate these 'crowded hives' without feelings of anxiety and apprehension almost amounting to dismay. The population, like the system to which it belongs, is NEW; but it is hourly increasing in breadth and strength. It is an aggregate of masses, our conception of which clothe themselves in terms that express something portentous and fearful ... as of the slow rising and gradual swelling of an ocean which must, at some future and no distant time, bear all the elements of society aloft upon its bosom, and float them Heaven knows whither. There are mighty energies slumbering in these masses. ... The manufacturing population is not new in its formation alone: it is new in its habits of thought and action, which have been formed by the circumstances of its condition, with little instruction, and less guidance, from external forces ... (W. Cooke Taylor 1842, in Thompson 1968:208-209).

If, as Hayden White has argued, the image of the noble savage was employed in the eighteenth century by the bourgeoisie to undermine the notion of nobility so as to better criticize the aristocratic order against which they were struggling, once that struggle was over, the notion



could be employed in the ideological battle against the urban poor and the working class.

The idea that the White working class was of a lower moral order than the Indians was part of the ideology behind the reserve system. Indians had to be protected from the vices of the lower classes with whom they came into contact. On the north shore of Lake Superior and the adjacent inland regions Indian agents were very concerned about the deleterious effects which interaction between White workers and Natives would have on the latter. In the late nineteenth century, the Natives' preference for seasonal wage labour in lumber camps and construction projects was thought by many Indian Agents to be responsible for the poor development of agriculture on the reserves and the civilizing effects an agricultural lifestyle was presumed to produce (Dunk 1987:5). It was commonly thought that White workers set a poor example and taught "bad habits" to the Natives. The reports of Indian Agents in the region frequently contain comments such as the following:

They are industrious and law-abiding, are never imprisoned for dishonesty, such as theft, etc., but sometimes for drinking, which is not often, as they are carefully looked after by three constables, and brought before me for trial. A great many belong to the temperance society, and never touch liquor. According to population, these Indians drink less and are better behaved than the white men by whom they are surrounded (Department of Indian Affairs 1897:22).

The Indians generally along the frontier are comparatively temperate in their habits, and especially so considering the bad example of

whites around them; and I can safely say that among the same number of whites there is more drinking and a lower morality to be found than among the same number of Indians (Department of Indian Affairs 1890:11).

The idea that Indians were of a higher moral character than the White working-class on the frontier was not restricted to Indian Agents. The use of the image of the Indian-as-noble-savage as an ideal-type against which the depravity of the lower classes of Euro-Canadian society could be measured is nicely illustrated in Suzanna Moodie's, Roughing It in the Bush (1962). While quarantined in the port of Montreal in 1832 because of a cholera epidemic in the city, she describes a day's activities:

It was four o'clock when we landed on the rocks, which the rays of an intensely scorching sun had rendered so hot that I could scarcely place my foot upon them. How the people without shoes bore it I cannot imagine. Never shall I forget the extraordinary spectacle that met our sight the moment we passed the low range of bushes which formed a screen in front of the river. A crowd of many Irish immigrants had been landed during the present and former day and all this motley crew -- men, women, and children, who were not confined by sickness to the sheds (which greatly resembled cattle-pens) -- were employed in washing clothes or spreading them out on the rocks and bushes to dry.

The men and boys were in the water, while the women, with their scanty garments tucked above their knees, were tramping their bedding in tubs or holes in the rocks, which the retiring tide had left half full of water. Those who did not possess washing tubs, pails, or iron pots, or could not obtain access to a hole in the rocks, were running to and fro, screaming and scolding, in no measured terms. The confusion of Babel was among them. All talkers and no hearers -- each shouting and yelling in his or her uncouth dialect, and all accompanying their vociferations with violent and extraordinary gestures, quite

incomprehensible to the uninitiated. We were literally stunned by the strife of tongues. I shrank, with feelings almost akin to fear, from the hard-featured, sunburnt women as they elbowed rudely past me.

I had heard and read much of savages, and have since seen, during my long residence in the bush, somewhat of uncivilized life, but the Indian is one of Nature's gentlemen -- he never says or does a rude or vulgar thing. The vicious, uneducated barbarians, who form the surplus of overpopulous European countries, are far behind the wild man in delicacy of feeling or natural courtesy. The people who covered the island appeared perfectly destitute of shame, or even a sense of common decency. Many were almost naked, still more but partially clothed. We turned in disgust from the revolting scene, but were unable to leave the spot until the captain had satisfied a noisy group of his own people, who were demanding a supply of stores.

And here I must observe that our passengers, who were chiefly honest Scotch labourers and mechanics from the vicinity of Edinburgh, and who while on board ship conducted themselves with the greatest propriety, and appeared the most quiet, orderly set of people in the world, no sooner set foot upon the island than they became infected by the same spirit of insubordination and misrule, and were just as insolent and noisy as the rest (Moodie 1962[1852]:24-25).

The behaviour of servants towards their masters in the New World was shocking to this English lady.

The utter want of that common courtesy with which a well-brought-up European addresses the poorest of his brethren, is severely felt at first by settlers in Canada. At the period of which I am now speaking, the titles of "sir," or "madam," were very rarely applied by inferiors. ... they treated our claims to their respect with marked insult and rudeness ... (Moodie 1962:139).

And speaking of servants brought to Canada, she observes:

They no sooner set foot upon the Canadian shores than they become possessed with this ultra-republican spirit. All respect for their employers, all subordination is at an end; the very air of Canada severs the tie of mutual

obligation which bound you together. They fancy themselves not only equal to you in rank, but that ignorance and vulgarity give them superior claims to notice (Moodie 1962:140).

To her credit, Susanna Moodie recognized that these attitudes stemmed from the conditions of the labour market in Canada. The labouring class was not required to follow old-country traditions of deference and respect because labour was at that time relatively scarce in Canada.

The image of the vulgarian lower classes on the frontier is also part of contemporary culture, as represented in the stereotype of the "redneck." As I have already stated, The Boys are sensitive about outsiders' perceptions of them. Certainly, some published literary representations of the local White population have reinforced this image of local Whites in Northwestern Ontario. One of the better-known writers to have written of the Indians and Whites in the region is Sheila Burnford, author of the best-selling animal story, The Incredible Journey (1961). She immigrated from England to Port Arthur after the second world war with her husband who was a physician. In 1969 she published Without Reserve, an account of her experiences with Native people in Northwestern Ontario.

In the present context, what is of interest is how she distinguishes herself from the local Whites on the basis of the interests she shares with Natives. As in Moodie's account of life in nineteenth-century Canada the Indians

have certain virtues while the Whites of the subordinate classes lack almost any redeeming values. This is illustrated most clearly in the following passage:

Then there was Tommy -- one of three workmen on a tree-planting project of mine. One of the three was of solid Dutch stock, whose talk was mostly of a grumbling personal nature, and whose eyes brightened only at the sight of a bottle of beer; one was a gigantic Finn who said nothing at all and worked like a bulldozer -- I doubt if his vision took in anything beyond the end of pick or shovel. The third was Tommy, small and slight, half Cree, half Ojib, who, as a laborer was probably not as worthy of his hire as the other two, but immeasurably worthier to me in other respects. Despite the loss of several fingers on one hand he tied strange magical flies (which he varied from day to day it seemed according to the portents) from almost anything he happened to have or pick up -- a piece of fur, a feather, a rubber band or a snip of pink plastic. He could take his knife to a piece of soft wood, whittling here, slicing there, until suddenly he gently slid the slices open and there would be an intricately carved fan. And he was a mine of information to me on everything that flew, walked or swam. His hands might be digging a hole but his eyes were everywhere. ...

The three were quite a study in contrasts. When they stopped for lunch and the other two had finished eating and drinking, they stretched out and had a little nap. Tommy, whose lunch had consisted of a piece of bannock fished out of his pocket and a drink of water from the lake, invariably vanished into the bush with my fishing rod and today's lethal lure. If he did not return -- usually late, to the tight-lipped indignation of the other two -- with a nice cleaned trout for my supper, it was always with news of something interesting going on in the bush, evidence of a bear or deer, or a hatch of partridge chicks. When it was time to down tools the others did so with promptitude, and left in the shortest possible line between (a) the site and (b) their car. Tommy was far more likely to walk around the shoreline so that he could show me where the mergansers were nesting on the way. The other two were hardworking and ambitious, and would undoubtedly get on in the New World; they were

only doing odd jobs at the moment because they were temporarily laid off at one of the mills. But I always thought they only existed whereas Tommy lived. And, as though to bear this out, the trees that he put in looked far more prosperous than the others the following year (Burnford 1969:32-34).

The image of local Whites as narrow-minded can also be found in Elizabeth Kouhi's children's book, Sarah Jane of Silver Islet (1983). The story is set in the newly constructed mining town in 1870. It revolves around, among other things, Sarah's alienation from the other local children because she enjoys books and they do not.

Tom Kelly's book, A Dream Like Mine (1987), which recently won the Governor General's Award for fiction, is a story of a Native who kidnaps the manager of a papermill in the vicinity of Kenora. The only local Whites who appear in the book aside from the papermill manager and the police are three pathetic figures who are evidently petty criminals recently released from jail.

We have then a two-pronged usage of Indian imagery. On the one hand, there is the general practice of defining White society as a whole in either positive or negative terms against the Indian. Whites in Northwestern Ontario are continuing in this long-established tradition in their negative appraisal of the Indian. On the other hand, the Indian is employed to represent an ideal against which the White working class and lower classes generally are measured and found wanting.

The Boys react against this definition of themselves. They draw attention to the actual conditions of Native people in the region, and define their own moral and intellectual worth in terms of those who are below them in the socio-economic hierarchy. Indians are a symbol of what they are not. Thus, they perceive Indians as lazy and welfare-dependent and oppose this to their self-reliance, their willingness to persevere at boring work, and their commitment to the ideal of reciprocity.

The symbolic way in which local Whites define their own place in the moral universe corresponds, in this sense, to what Braroe (1975) observed in a small Prairie town.

In Short Grass the respective self-images of Indians and Whites take a dual form in which each appears morally inferior to the other. And each group acts in ways that project this image of inferiority onto the other, though largely ignorant of the result of their actions. There is a sort of negative division of symbolic labor: the attainment of a morally defensible self for both Indian and White occurs at the expense of the other, and in an atmosphere in which each represents a moral threat to the other. The failure, or refusal, of Whites to extend assistance of some kind to Indians is taken by them as evidence of their moral superiority, but is taken by the Indians as proof of White moral failure. Conversely sharing among Indians is seen by them as a reflection of their moral worth, whereas Whites see it as evidence of the Indians greediness and as a cause of their low economic and moral status. There is a complementarity in which Indians and Whites in doing what they think proper, each offer to the other clear proof of their moral deficiency" (Braroe 1975:186-187).

Definitions of moral worth are not, however, constructed in a dichotomous relationship. For The Boys

there is an important third element: the class/regional source of their own subordination. Local Whites generally -- and the working-class individuals who have been the specific subject of my research do not only define themselves against the Indians. They also define themselves against the perceived dominant power bloc.

In the era of the welfare state, humanistic liberalism is the philosophy of the power bloc. In Canada this philosophy is expressed in, among other things, the belief that Canada is a multicultural society, and that ethnicity is the primary source of conflict in the nation. It does not recognize the structural basis of social inequality rooted in class domination. The State's focus on ethnicity means that those who are no longer "ethnics" are assumed to be part of the "middle class" which it is imagined the vast majority of the population belongs to.

The Boys and many others in Northwestern Ontario are aware of the fact that they do not belong to some mythical social group for whom class relations are unimportant. They respond to their subordination by reacting against what they perceive to be the dominant ideology of the State. They celebrate their own cultural values and vigorously reject those they feel are promoted by the power bloc. But they do so by emphasizing their own difference and superiority over the most visible ethnic group in the region. They hold their views about Indians because of a conflict over access



to the resources of the state, because of a long tradition in which Indians are employed as a symbol of otherness, and because by holding such views they demarcate themselves from the dominant social group. For The Boys what one thinks about Indians is not a matter of intelligence, but a sign of what side one is on in the struggle to assert one's own moral and intellectual worth. The Boys' ideas about Indians are an expression of how regionalism and ethnicity are vehicles by which they express their sense of class.

## CHAPTER FIVE: COMMONSENSE AND ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN WORKING-CLASS CULTURE

In class societies, everything takes place as if the struggle for the power to impose the legitimate mode of thought and expression that is unceasingly waged in the field of the production of symbolic goods tended to conceal, not least from the eyes of those involved in it, the contribution it makes to the delimitation of the universe of discourse, that is to say, the universe of the thinkable, and hence to the delimitation of the universe of the unthinkable (Bourdieu 1977:170).

Though it is usually misrecognised, one of the things which keeps the capitalist system stable, and is one of its complex wonders, is that an important section of the subordinate class do not accept the proffered reality of the steady diminution of their own capacities. Instead they reverse the valuation of the mental/manual gradient by which they are measured (Willis 1977:148).

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the importance of commonsense and its relationship to anti-intellectualism as themes in working-class culture. The negative attitudes towards women and Natives which refract The Boys' expression of their perception of their own position in the social relations of production are firmly embedded in commonsense. As a mode of thought, commonsense forms the substratum of The Boys' analysis of society. The Boys, and the working class as a whole, are not unique in this regard; however, commonsense has a particular significance in working-class culture because of the way it relates to the subordinate position of the working class in society.

In his classic work, The Uses of Literacy, Hoggart

wrote:

If we want to capture something of the essence of working-class life ... we must say that it is the 'the dense and concrete life', a life whose main stress is the intimate, the sensory, the detailed, the personal. This would no doubt be true of working-class groups anywhere in the world (Hoggart 1957:104-105).

The emphasis on the immediate and the concrete is a function of the dialectical process by which working-class individuals constitute their own identity. It is related to the way knowledge is defined and valued in society as a whole, and represents an inversion of the dominant ideas of what constitutes important and useful knowledge.

## 5.2. The Characteristics of Commonsense Thought

In anthropological discussions, commonsense is presented as the horizon of possible understanding in any culture. Every culture has its own version of commonsense, of what appear as the naturally given facts that are beyond dispute. Bourdieu uses the concept of "doxa" to refer to commonsense. Doxa are the unstated assumptions that are unstated precisely because they are perceived as obvious and natural. They contain both orthodox and heterodox opinions; they are the field within which discourse and thought take place. As he says:

Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of objective chances and

the agents' aspirations, out which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality ... Schemes of thought and perception can produce the objectivity that they do only by producing the misrecognition of the limits of the cognition that they do make possible, thereby founding immediate adherence in the doxic mode, to the world of tradition experienced as a "natural world" and taken for granted (Bourdieu 1977:164).

This is very similar to the way Raymond Williams uses the notion of hegemony:

[The concept of hegemony] sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living ... to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense (Williams 1977:110).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century commonsense was celebrated as part of the opposition to the authority of Aristotle and Biblical versions of reality. Commonsense was important in the move towards science and the idea that causes could be discerned through the observation of reality (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith 1971:348). Critics of aristocratic privilege and State corruption appealed to commonsense.<sup>1</sup>

Today the term "commonsense" is used in everyday speech to refer to down-to-earth thinking, as opposed to theory. It is the practical, clear-headed, simply-stated solutions to problems that are apparent to anyone, or at least anyone

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Paine, the English radical, titled one of his most influential pamphlets Common Sense (1791).

who is down-to-earth.

In what exactly does the merit of what is normally termed 'common sense' or 'good sense' consist? Not just in the fact that, if only implicitly, common sense applies the principle of causality, but in the much more limited fact that in a whole range of judgements common sense identifies the exact cause, simple and to hand, and does not let itself be distracted by fancy quibbles, and pseudo-profound, pseudo-scientific metaphysical mumbo-jumbo (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith 1971:348).

The Boys conceive of commonsense in this manner. Their opinions about Indians, women and Southerners are not presented as if they are the result of long reflection and difficult analysis. In The Boys' opinion, the strength of their ideas is the fact that they are easy to arrive at; one does not need to study or reflect deeply to reach them. Their explanation of the vandalism at the baseball diamond exemplifies this attitude. When I suggested that it was possible that someone other than Indians may be responsible, they did not understand why I needed to invent a more complex theory about the vandalism. Indeed, they feel that anyone who will not accept the "obvious" explanation is either weak or lacking in intelligence.

The Boys consider a person weak because he appears unable to deal with the "facts of life". Their attitude towards Indians was often couched in terms such as "It's too bad but that's the way they are." This is how our difference of opinion over the explanation of the vandalism of the baseball field was treated. In The Boys' opinion I

was unwilling to accept the obvious because I had been to university and had been taught that, as one of them expressed it to me, "everything should be nice." He went on to inform me that "in the real world there's a lot of shit and there's no point in pretending there isn't." In his opinion, I was being naive.

One of The Boys drew an analogy between my attitude about the vandalism of the baseball diamond and someone from "down East" whom he had once helped when their car was broken down on the side of the road.

I came along and could see the hood up. It was some Japanese car, a Honda or something. I pulled up and I asked him what was the matter. He said, "I don't know, it just kind of sputtered and stopped". I asked him if he was out of gas. He said, "No the needle said there was still gas in the tank." I said to him, "are you sure the gas gauge works?" He said, "Sure, why wouldn't it?" So I didn't say anything for a while. He had the little book from the glove compartment out. I guess he thought it would tell him what to do. Anyway, finally I said, "Let's just try putting some gas in the tank. It can't hurt." So I got out the can I carry in the back of the van and sure enough it fires right up. I think he felt kind of stupid. He didn't even say thanks. But he's just like you. Instead of asking the obvious questions, he's digging around under the hood with that stupid book in his hand looking for some complicated problem as if he could fix it. Christ, if I hadn't shown up he probably would have started taking the plugs out and then he would have had to get a tow truck ... [he shakes his head] ... Just use your head.

The Boys' attitudes towards women are also based upon the "obvious" facts. That women are less capable than men at most physical things was simply "true" in their opinion. It is not debatable because, according to them, anyone could

see it was the case. Attempts to explain the perceived differences as the result of historical practices whereby women were denied the right to participate in these activities are viewed as attempts to complicate the issue and are ultimately thought to be irrelevant since "we live now, not yesterday". Historical explanations of Native poverty were treated in the same way. Even if they are true they are irrelevant because what is important is the present.

Geertz (1975b) has analyzed commonsense as a systematic and totalizing form of thought, as a cultural system. It is, therefore, not to be understood as an underdeveloped precursor to scientific thought, but as a structured paradigm for making sense of the world. Its five defining characteristics are "naturalness", "practicalness", "thinness", "immethodicalness", and "accessibleness".

Briefly, these terms can be explained as follows: Naturalness is the most fundamental. By this term is designated the sense of "of-courseness" (1975b:18) which commonsense conveys, the inherent nature of the case. Practicalness refers to just that -- the fact that commonsense in normal usage is defined against the impractical musings of those "whose feet aren't on the ground".<sup>2</sup> Geertz points out that practicalness and

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<sup>2</sup> This statement is from my own notes. It is one of the many sayings by which the mental/manual distinction is expressed. On numerous occasions they were used to describe

naturalness are qualities commonsense "bestows upon things, not one that things bestow upon it" (1975b:22). Thinness is a means of expressing the obviousness of commonsense knowledge, the fact that there is in this frame of thought no doubting its "truths". By immethodicalness is meant the lack of consistency which is a prominent feature of commonsense thought. Moreover,

Commonsense wisdom is shamelessly and unapologetically ad hoc. It comes in epigrams, proverbs, obiter dicta, jokes, anecdotes, contes morals -- a clatter of gnomic utterances -- not in formal doctrines, axiomized theories or architectonic dogmas (Geertz 1975b:23).

Finally, accessibleness refers to the fact that commonsense knowledge is readily available to everyone. It requires no special skills. Anyone with normal mental faculties is capable of understanding commonsense wisdom (Geertz 1975b:24).

Commonsense thought is opposed to the forms of thought acquired through education and "book learning". The latter tends to be formalized, restricted to those who complete an educational program -- and therefore elitist -- abstract, and often, so it seems to many, irrelevant to practical issues. Anti-intellectualism is for these reasons associated with a preference for commonsense.

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me, since it often seemed I was incapable of grasping what was obvious to everyone else.



### 5.3. Anti-Intellectualism and the Division Between Mental and Manual Labour

It is necessary to define the question of anti-intellectualism in working-class culture very clearly. Under no circumstances is the statement that "anti-intellectualism is part of working-class culture" intended to suggest that working-class individuals are unintelligent, that they do not think, that they have no ideas about the world, that they are not interested in knowledge, that they are simple-minded, that they do not think about fundamental issues, that they are more narrow-minded than other social classes or groups, or any other statement which says or implies that working-class individuals lack the mental competence or interest possessed by other members of society. All people are philosophers, as Gramsci says,<sup>3</sup> and the statement that anti-intellectualism is an aspect of working-class culture is in no way intended to suggest this is not true of the working class. The most simple task, the most de-skilled job, requires at least some degree of intellect. The most manual of tasks requires mental activity; "every kind of work includes 'mental activity',

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<sup>3</sup> "It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first be shown that all men are 'philosophers', by defining the limits and characteristics of the 'spontaneous philosophy' which is proper to everybody" (Gramsci in Hoare and Nowell Smith 1971:323).

but not ... every kind of work is located on the mental labour side in the politico-ideological division between mental and manual labour" (Poulantzas 1978:254). Even those people stuck in the least mentally stimulating occupation create through their intellect a meaningful world in and around their work.

By 'anti-intellectualism' I am referring to a preferred form of thought which is embedded in a set of cultural practices and beliefs, and which is formed in opposition to the perceived characteristics of other cultural practices associated with those deemed by society for various reasons to have intellectual skills. It is a way of thinking about the world and what really matters in it; a mode of approaching problems and issues that favours certain kinds of interpretations over others.

In working-class culture, commonsense and anti-intellectualism are inextricably bound up with the division between mental and manual labour which is a dominant feature of contemporary capitalist societies. The working class's preferred form of thought is both an expression of its place on the manual side of this distinction, and a reversal of the status the two sides of this division have in society as a whole. Occupations on the mental side of this division generally carry higher prestige, status and money than those on the manual side, yet in working-class culture the manual side is more highly valued.

The division between mental and manual labour is an ideological phenomenon based on cultural practices and rituals that separate those with a certain kind of training, who have successfully completed a set of rituals, and who therefore have credentials, from those who do not. It is not a matter of knowledge on one side and a lack of knowledge on the other. "What is involved is rather an ideological encasement of science in a whole series of rituals of knowledge, or supposed knowledge, from which the working class is excluded, and it is in this way that the mental/manual labour division functions" (Poulantzas 1978:254).

Poulantzas explains what some of these rituals are:

This mental labour is encased in a whole series of rituals, know-how, and 'cultural' elements that distinguish it from the working class. ... If these ideological symbols have little in common [sic] with any real differentiation in the order of elements of science, they nevertheless legitimize this distinction as if it had such a basis. This cultural symbolism is well enough known for us not to have to dwell on it. It extends from the traditional esteem given to 'paper work' and 'clerical workers' in general (to know how to write and present ideas), to a certain use of 'speech' (one must know how to 'speak well' in order to sell products and make business deals -- the 'art of salesmanship'), and finally includes ideological differentiations between general culture and savoir-faire on the one hand, and technical skills (manual labour) on the other. All of these things, of course, require a certain training: learning to write in a certain way, to speak in a certain way, to dress in a certain way for work, to take part in certain customs and usages. This 'certain way' is always the other way, opposed to that of the working class, and moreover, it claims to be the sign of a particular 'savoir-faire', which is evaluated positively in

opposition to the working class. Everything that needs to be known in this respect is that which the others (the working-class) do not know, or even cannot know (through original sin); this is the knowledge that matters, genuine knowledge. 'Brain workers' are defined in relation to others (the working class). The main thing in fact is to know how to 'intellectualize' oneself in relation to the working class; to know in these practices that one is more 'intelligent', that one has more 'personality' than the working class, which for its part, can at most be 'capable'. And to have the monopoly and secrecy of this 'knowledge' (Poulantzas 1978:258).

This division between mental and manual labour is not a simple social phenomenon. It is increasingly an aspect of actual labour processes. It reflects the social separation between conception and execution. This "separation of hand and brain" is one of the most significant aspects of the division of labour intensified by the capitalist mode of production, and it has significant ideological and political implications.

The novelty of this development during the past century lies not in the separate existence of hand and brain, conception and execution, but the rigor with which they are divided from one another, and then increasingly subdivided, so that conception is concentrated, insofar as possible, in ever more limited groups within management or closely associated with it. Thus, in the setting of antagonistic social relations, of alienated labor, hand and brain become not just separated, but divided and hostile and the human unity of hand and brain turns into its opposite, something less than human (Braverman 1974:125).

Braverman prefers the notion of the separation between conception and execution over the mental/manual labour distinction because the process of deskilling which is, for him, an inherent feature of the capitalist mode of

production, affects both sides of the dichotomy. It is necessary, according to the logic of the capitalist mode of production, because if labourers both conceive the work and execute it, it is impossible for management to enforce upon them "either the methodological efficiency or the working pace desired by capital" (Braverman 1974:113-114). Even mental labour is divided up in this way: "mental labor is first separated from manual labor and ... is then itself subdivided rigorously according to the same rule" (Braverman 1974:114).

This is an important observation for it draws attention to the fact that many clerical jobs and other kinds of work in the service sector of the economy that seem to fit on the mental side of the mental/manual distinction, are as deskilled and alienating as many manual occupations. This is one more reason, along with those discussed in Chapters One and Two, the common distinction made between blue-collar and white-collar workers is misleading. In the modern economy there are many people who do not wear blue collars to work, yet whose work involves few skills, carries little prestige and is relatively poorly paid. Women, ethnic minorities and youth are often the majority of workers in these categories.

This is an important fact in the makeup of the informal group I studied. As I described in Chapters One and Two, The Boys include individuals who are classic blue-collar

workers in the sense of unskilled, assembly-line, factory workers, and others who occupy white-collar positions with the government. There are important differences in their work experience, but many similarities. Certainly, in the more general sense of a shared culture, the work experience is similar enough that a commitment to common themes based on problems with superiors, lack of control at work, and the difficulties involved in shift work is evident in their discussions.

The division between mental and manual labour has many implications for the experience of working class people. What Sennett and Cobb (1973) refer to as the hidden injuries of class are the result of the different valuation society places on the two sides of the dichotomy. The hidden injuries are based on the low self-esteem typical of many working-class individuals, which results from the low esteem of working-class jobs and the low appreciation of working-class skills in society as a whole.

This low self-esteem produces some very painful consequences for the working class that members of other classes do not experience. A particularly striking example, discussed by Sennett and Cobb (1973:128), is that for what they call middle-class children to succeed, in the sense this term has for society at large, means that they become like their parents in terms of class and culture. For working-class children, however, it means they, by

definition, must become different from their parents. Thus, working-class parents face the dilemma of either seeing their kids "fail" in the same sense they have, or of having them "succeed" but no longer having very much in common with them. Moving into the middle class means learning a different way of speaking, of learning the savoir-faire of which Poulantzas speaks, of developing non-working-class interests, and often produces a situation in which the parents do not feel comfortable in the milieu in which their children live. Parents and children no longer have common interests.

The situation of the working class resembles that of colonized people in so far as it involves a debased self-image. Many individuals internalize the middle-class visions of the working class as intellectually and culturally inferior. Working-class children who succeed in making the climb into the middle class may not be truly accepted in either their new class environment, or in the old. A retired elevator worker related to me how during the war he was promoted to a flying officer in the R.C.A.F.. When he arrived home at the end of the war, the first thing his mother did was tear his officer's stripes off his uniform to remind him that he was not "a big shot".

Sennett and Cobb's analysis poignantly illustrates some of the real pain involved in the stigma of being working class. But many working-class individuals do not passively

live out the implications of the low esteem society bestows upon them. They invert the categories; they celebrate and value the manual side of the division; they delight in what educated professionals often consider mediocre, mass arts and activities; they do not accept the idea that their skills, knowledge and jobs are unimportant or of little value.

The best recent analysis of this reaction is Willis's Learning to Labour (1977). He follows a group of non-conformist working-class boys through the last year of school and into their first year on the job. The whole non-conformist school culture is a reaction to the formal teachings of the school. It is a blatant inversion of the values the school curriculum is intended to inculcate in students. Ironically, the very rejection of the school system prepares "the lads" for the life of an unskilled labourer. They more readily fit into the shopfloor culture and are often preferred by employers over conformist students because despite all their roughness and external disrespect for authority their strong sense of "them" and "us", involves an implicit acceptance of "them". Students who Willis refers to as conformists, on the other hand, accept the ideology of the system. They believe what school teaches them about the organization of society; they trust in the notion of meritocracy; they expect their work to be enjoyable and authority relations to be based on relative



merit. They do not fit as easily into the shop-floor culture and are more likely to become disaffected.

Thus, the stigma of belonging to the working class, of being on the devalued side (according to the dominant ideology) of the division between mental and manual labour does produce some psychological "injuries", but the principles upon which the manual is devalued relative to the mental are also resisted. The latter action does not necessarily, however, lead to a solution. As Willis has shown, ironically this kind of resistance actually serves the needs of the system and in the end helps reproduce the relations upon which the mental/manual dichotomy is based.

The so-called new middle class (or new petty bourgeoisie) occupies many of the jobs which fall on the mental side of the mental/manual distinction, although this class is, of course, far from a homogeneous mass. The growth of this class is intimately related to recent changes in the state and economy -- the development of the welfare state, of monopoly capitalism, of the service sector as a major facet of the contemporary economy. The working-class reaction to the new middle class is bound together with its reaction to the welfare state, the service sector, especially publicly-funded social services, and the huge corporations, all of which are major factors in contemporary society. As we saw in Chapter Four, in Northwestern Ontario the local elite is largely from outside of the region. The

mental/manual labour dichotomy corresponds to the local/outsider dichotomy in the opinion of many local people.

#### 5.4. Commonsense and Anti-Intellectualism as a Penetration of the Dominant Ideology

According to The Boys the manual side of this distinction is more valuable than the mental, even though this is not recognized in society as a whole, since power lies in the hands of those who perform mental labour. The practical incompetence of intellectuals, bureaucrats, and other professionals is a fundamental conception in the cultural realm of the working class. A staple topic of conversation among my informants is the ignorance, often born of snobbery and lack of respect for the on-the-spot knowledge of the "working man", characteristic of "educated types" and management. These stories are usually performed as humorous mini-dramas. There are also many references in the local working-class idiom to this fact. At the grain elevator where I worked in the 1970s we had a saying for what were considered stupid ideas: we called them "jimmies", after the supervisor who it seemed was always inventing "more efficient" ways of doing things which usually amounted to more work for us but whose actual efficiency was highly doubtful from our point of view.

The anti-intellectualism of the working class is a penetration of an aspect of the dominant ideology of

capitalist society. As Marx outlines in the first chapter of Capital (1977), the capitalist mode of production gives rise to the appearance that all individuals are freely competing in the market. Success or failure depends on one's achievements. For many social scientists this is what is distinctive about modern Western society. Social status, prestige, and material reward are the result of individual achievement rather than an ascribed location in the social hierarchy. Education is one of the achievements by which individuals earn status, prestige and material rewards. Certain kinds of knowledge have a greater exchange value than others both in terms of money capital and cultural capital.

Working-class anti-intellectualism is rooted, at one level, in an implicit critique of this ideology. It questions the assumption that some kinds of knowledge are more valuable than others, that formal education of certain kinds necessarily confers a greater use-value upon one's labour. It is based on the view that the exchange-value of certain kinds of knowledge and/or the trappings of that knowledge, such as degrees, is out of proportion to the actual use-value of that knowledge. As Hall et al. put it, working-class anti-intellectualism

represents the response of a subordinated social class to the established hierarchical class system and the social distribution of 'valid' knowledge that accompanied that hierarchy (especially as marked out educationally by certificates, examination passes, diplomas, degrees, and so on).

Its anti-intellectualism is a class response to that unequal distribution of knowledge: a response from a class which emphasizes practical knowledge, first-hand experience of doing things, because it is the response of a working class (Hall et al. 1978:152).

The stereotype of the professor who is pathetically incompetent at any practical activity has wide currency among The Boys. Moreover, there is a perception that occupational elites such as lawyers and doctors have a monopoly which manipulates the system to their benefit. Lawyers especially are categorized alongside used-car salesmen in the ethical hierarchy of occupations. Academics and lawyers are seen to contribute little to the practical needs of society.

This appraisal is based in part on old suspicions and stereotypes. It is given social force by the antagonism which develops through interactions between working-class individuals and those who hold high-status occupations. The sense of powerlessness one has when confronted with the legal system and with lawyers, the common failure of doctors to solve medical problems, the assumption that secrecy surrounds what academics actually do and why they do it -- all of this reinforces the suspicion of and hostility towards elites which enjoy high social status and high incomes because of their supposed intellectual abilities.

The negative appraisal of those holding specialized knowledge also stems from experience on the shop floor or job site. Part of this is the antagonism born of the

special privileges of the technocrats and administrators -- the reserved parking spots, the clean lunch rooms, the steady day shift, and the separate entrances into the office area of the plant.

But it is also located in the fact that the workers' practical experience and knowledge of the job is often ignored in both short- and long-term planning. Indeed, the poor organization of the labour process and/or the simple facts which were overlooked by the expert and which render a work situation more difficult than it need be, or a task impossible, are central themes in conversations about work.

Consider, for example, the following three examples:

1. I was in the bar on a Wednesday evening having a discussion about work with two men who drive pulp trucks. They were working for company A but had worked for others in the past. They were discussing which runs they preferred. One of them talked at length of how another company had a better system for loading and unloading trucks. The turn-around time was shorter than under the system company A used. "But who is going to ask us?" he said.

2. I was sitting at a kitchen table having coffee with a retired elevator worker. We were talking about building a kiln for firing pottery. Bob thought it would be a good idea to seek advice from someone at a pottery fair who has a

kiln. "Maybe we could get a plan," he said. I replied that the person for whom the kiln was to be built already had a plan. "Yeah," Bob replied, "but they were made by some engineer who never used a kiln." From there Bob went on to recall larger blunders made by engineers and architects in the design of grain elevators because they "never asked the people who worked in grain elevators all their lives." He recounted how one elevator was so poorly planned a extra two million dollars had to be spent digging a slip for ships on the opposite side to where it should have gone.<sup>4</sup> He mentioned how the direction of the wind was never taken into account when the elevators were built. In Thunder Bay the wind often blows off the lake and is very bitter in the winter. Bob is convinced that if the designers had ever asked the men who worked in elevators about this, much of the discomfort caused by cold and dust could have been eliminated. "Nobody ever thought or considered it important enough to ask the guy who has worked in the elevators all his life. It's just because the poor bugger in the elevator only has a grade six education."

Bob who was a weighman also described an elevator that had the scale floor windows on the wrong side. They overlooked the track shed which was covered by a roof and so

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<sup>4</sup> I do not know if this story is true. What is important in the present context is what it reveals about Bob's attitude toward professionals such as architects and engineers.

nothing could be seen anyway. If they had been over the slip the men on the scale floor would have been able to see what was happening when they were loading a boat.

3. On a Saturday night I was at the home of a draftsman who has worked for a government department for 30 years. A friend and co-worker was over to visit. They began to discuss work and quickly turned to a discussion of the engineers, who are their superiors on the job. The conversation revolved around which engineers were "good" and which were "bad". The main criterion of differentiation was whether or not they would consult with the local draftsmen and other less skilled people regarding local conditions. One fellow in particular was said to be "all right" because he was "big enough" to admit when he did not know something about a particular issue and would ask the experienced subordinates on the job. He was contrasted with a newly arrived engineer from "down East" (Toronto) who never consulted the experienced local draftsmen and surveyors about anything.

Discussions such as these indicate that the workers feel their opinions are rarely sought regarding work conditions and techniques. They also show that the workers feel they have a special kind of knowledge based on practical experience which the experts feel can be ignored.

They do not feel one needs great skill or training to attain this knowledge. Often they express it in terms of its obviousness and its simplicity. What is required, however, is a certain attitude -- an attention to the little details that are apparent to people with a close relationship to a particular locale and activity.

The difference in approach is analogous to the difference between abstract theorizing and detailed empirical description. Indeed, this is how the difference is often expressed, albeit not using the same terminology. One interesting stylistic feature of working-class verbal communication in Thunder Bay is the way in which situations or scenarios are reported in great detail. A conversation one had with someone is recounted verbatim. It takes the form of: "I said, then he said, then I said, then he said ...".

Lengthy digressions on the incompetence of the boss or foreman are another common feature of discussions of the work place. This is not universally applied to all supervisors for often they, or at least those at the lower level, are drawn from the ranks of the workers. Workers distinguish between "good" and "bad" foremen. But all of these individuals are in a highly ambiguous situation. On the one hand, they have personal relationships, even friendships, with the people over whom they have authority. On the other hand, they are obliged to enforce management's



desires vis-à-vis the workers on the shop floor. Changes in the behaviour of new foremen are closely observed by the men. Those who become too authoritative are soon the object of ridicule.

In the track shed of the elevator where I worked the supervisor was famous for his incompetence. The track shed is where railroad cars are unloaded or loaded with grain. There were three different means of unloading. Older box cars were "shovelled" out with a board (the "shovel") which was directed by one man but pulled by cables connected to a hydraulic system. This is the oldest way of emptying a box car, and it is very dirty and physically demanding. Alternatively, box cars would be "dumped" on the "shaker". This is a hydraulic device which picks up the box car and literally shakes the grain into the hopper. The only physical task is sweeping the car clean after it has been emptied. The third process simply involved opening the hopper doors on the bottom of the newer tanker-style grain cars.

There were also three ways of loading grain in the track shed. The tank cars were loaded through the top. The job simply involved moving the car by means of a hydraulic winch and directing the spout to spread the grain evenly. Box cars were loaded from a spout which had to be lifted onto the grain doors which cover three-quarters of the box car's own door, and then the spout had to be directed to

distribute grain evenly in the box car. This task is dirty because of the dust, and difficult because the spout is heavy, especially when the grain is pouring through it. The other means of loading cars involved 50-kilogram sacks of malt piled by hand in box cars. This task was also very demanding physically.

The person who became supervisor was said to be unable to do the physically demanding jobs, so he was moved inside the elevator where the work is less arduous. But even there he was incompetent. On the transfer floor, where various kinds of grains are moved by conveyor belt from one bin to another before and after cleaning, or to the scale before loading, he apparently fell asleep in the midst of a transfer. A spill occurred and by the time it was discovered he was almost completely buried in a growing pile of grain. He was promoted to supervisor shortly after this event.

This story -- I will never know if it is actually true, although the older men swore to it -- took on special significance in the context of this supervisor's strict enforcement of rules perceived by the workers to be childish. He constantly complained that we talked to each other in the bagging room, where the malt was put into the sacks. He invented seemingly mindless tasks to keep the men occupied during slow periods (moving piles of grain doors from one side of the track shed to the other). The overall

conviction of the men was that this was one more example of the incompetence of management in the task of organizing the labour process, and that the supervisor had been raised to this position in spite of his obvious incompetence.

The elevator superintendent's son also worked at the elevator. He never worked in the track shed which was considered the dirtiest and hardest place to work. His father made sure he started inside the elevator. He was clearly grooming him for a management position. To the men this was a clear indication of how the ideology of meritocracy was completely contradicted by the facts; kinship was the important factor. We responded by completely ostracizing the superintendent's son, and tales of his mental and physical incompetence abounded.

The negative image of the kind of knowledge exhibited by management also results from the fact that there is a great respect among workers for anyone with practical skills. Flattery often takes the form of a statement such as "Joe there, he's one hell of a nice guy, and a good electrician too." Moreover, as a group many working-class individuals are, as they say, "do-it-yourselfers". To the greatest extent possible they attempt to avoid the market place, especially when it comes to constructing homes, or refinishing interiors, car and small equipment repairs, and so on. There is a flourishing "informal" labour exchange between individuals with different skills and different

kinds of equipment. Indeed, the dominance of generalized reciprocity within the informal group is evident in this practice.<sup>5</sup>

These practical skills are not, however, embedded in social status differentiations, although they are an important aspect of an individual's reputation. The possession of practical skills is a necessary if not sufficient element in one's popularity. In other words, it is the demonstration of the actual use-value of one's knowledge and one's skills in ways which are readily evident that counts in the assessment of an individual and of a way of thinking. The mere possession of formal training, of a degree or diploma, is not a sufficient cause for respect.

Thus, even though in the social formation as a whole certain kinds of knowledge and forms of thought are both economic and cultural capital, within working-class culture those forms are not valued culturally or economically. There is an inversion of the hierarchy. Commonsense and practical skills are valued. More abstract forms of thought and less immediate and obvious skills are denigrated. They are "foreign" practices, signs of a difference. Social closure takes place around these kind of indicators. The

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<sup>5</sup> This is true of families as well. Lending equipment, cars or trucks, and giving advice is very common. The classic working-class community may be gone, but with the automobile and telephones the extended family as an economic unit persists, albeit in an altered form. One does not have to live with parents and siblings to see them frequently and to maintain mutual dependence and obligations.

social displacement of the "scholarship boy or girl" is, at an individual level, an example of this. His or her success in the educational realm separates him from his former peers. There is no longer anything to discuss with his former friends and even family. There is no longer a shared language or form of thought.

#### 5.5. Words and Things, Doers and Talkers, Theory and Commonsense

The inversion of the mental/manual labour dichotomy can be expressed in a number of other dichotomies. One is the distinction between words and things. On the one side are all those social categories and occupations that are based on the use of words: politicians, lawyers, teachers, bureaucrats, salesmen, writers, managers, students. Such activities do not involve, directly at least, acting upon the material world. People in these occupations or statuses do not construct anything that is useful in the physical sense; they manipulate language. Their value on the labour market and the social status is derived from their knowledge of a specialized language, a language designed in part at least to exclude individuals who have not performed the rituals required to gain entry into their closed world. They possess cultural capital, but not knowledge and skills that are useful in the production of things.

On the other side are the activities and occupations that involve the use of things so as to produce material

objects or physical effects. These involve most of the skilled and unskilled jobs typically considered working class. Tradesmen, workers in manufacturing, transportation workers, even low-level office workers such as secretaries are considered to be people who actually do something; they do not just talk.

A retired grain-elevator worker, told me once: "They have a bunker, you know, for all the politicians in case of nuclear war. They're all lawyers, those buggers. Well, they'll be sitting in the dark, because a light bulb will burn out and none of them will know what to do. They've all been to university, but they don't know their ass from a hole in the ground." This disdain for those who manipulate words rather than produce objects or perform useful services is a powerful element in the thought of the male working class in Thunder Bay.

This dichotomy is not always clear-cut, however. Medical doctors, for instance, are in an ambiguous position. They are respected for their skills in so far as they operate on bodies and are able to cure physical ailments, but they are not trusted because they use specialized jargon "ordinary people" do not understand, and for the fact that, despite their tremendous social prestige and high incomes, their activity is often ineffectual.

The dichotomy between words and things is also expressed in the opposition of talkers and doers. In this

form, it is inscribed in a dominant theme in the personal style of The Boys. This mode of behaviour de-emphasizes the importance of conversation in the bourgeois sense of being able to make small talk on a wide range of subjects. Being a good conversationalist in that sense is not a useful social skill in this culture. Cocktail conversation is not a skill anyone is concerned to develop. It has no function in this culture, whereas it is very important among at least some groups in the so-called new middle class. "Networking" is a crucial aspect in the careers of many professionals. Knowing how to discuss the "in" topics and the latest intellectual fads, using an erudite turn of phrase -- these are all important in the culture of professionals and intellectuals, they are aspects of the savoir-faire Poulantzas mentions. For The Boys' they are signs of snobbery and elitism. Once, after a baseball game I used the word "utilitarian." I was told to "fuck off with the five-dollar words and speak English."

There is variation among The Boys, of course, but there is a strong tendency towards silence, especially in mixed company. I have spent evenings in a group where barely a dozen words were exchanged, yet no one considered the evening to be boring. What there was of conversation involved jokes and humorous insults, rather than any extended discussion about a particular subject. This does not reflect a lack of ideas; rather, it is an expression of

the conviction that actions are more important than words.

Gender stereotyping is partly based on this dichotomy: women like to talk; or as it was sometimes expressed, women talk too much. Men, on the other hand, know when to be quiet. They measure their worth by what they do, not what they say.

Another dichotomy relevant to this discussion is the distinction between theory and practice. As I have already indicated, the working class is firmly on the side of practical as against theoretical knowledge.

The shopfloor abounds with apocryphal stories about the idiocy of purely theoretical knowledge. Practical ability always comes first and is a condition of other kinds of knowledge. Whereas in middle class culture knowledge and qualifications are seen as a way of shifting upwards the whole mode of practical alternatives open to an individual, in working-class eyes theory is riveted to particular productive practices. If it cannot earn its keep there it is to be rejected (Willis 1977:56).

Not only is the possession of practical skills and knowledge an element of an individual's popularity, masculinity is inextricably connected to being "handy"; that is, being able to repair and build things yourself. Practical skills of this nature are intrinsic to notions of manliness. They are part of the domestic division of labour within the working class. Put simply, women cook, clean, and sew; men do the large repairs to the house and car. However, in this division, female skills, while devalued, are still practical. In this sense, the division between theoretical



knowledge and practical skills is perceived more as a class division than a boundary marker between genders.

Theory that produces no immediate material effects or has no obvious applicability in an actual situation is suspect. Knowledge that cannot be transformed into a practical good is a waste of time and money. From this flows a latent hostility toward university students and professors, especially those in the Arts. It also has important repercussions with regard to the way The Boys perceive radical social theories. Since there is little chance that calls for radical change will amount to anything, they are perceived as useless chatter. Similarly, historical discussions of contemporary social problems are considered to be pointless since what is past is past and what matters are immediate solutions. This is illustrated in The Boys' attitudes toward Natives. Few deny Native people were mistreated and exploited historically. They feel, though, that this is irrelevant. One must learn to adjust to contemporary conditions. The past is past; one must live in the present.

#### 5.6. The Limitations of Anti-Intellectualism

The inversion of the division between mental and manual labour is, then, an oppositional practice. It is a way of marking the working class off from intellectuals and professionals, from the representatives of capital and the

state. The preference for certain modes of thought is central to the identity of The Boys; it is a cultural boundary. Of course, the differences are expressed, not in terms of class, but in terms of "the people", "the man in the street", "the regular guy", versus "the big shots", "the snobby bastards", and so on.

Categories such as these have very vague boundaries. Indeed, the petty bourgeoisie identifies quite readily with the working class on this question of the social status and economic value of experts, bureaucrats, intellectuals and all those individuals who occupy central positions in the contemporary technocratic state. On an international scale, the resurgence of right-wing populism in the 1970s and 80s is rooted partly in the fact that the right's attack on the welfare state is expressed in terms of the "privileged" position in society of the technocrats and bureaucrats. The failure to deal with the fact of bureaucracy either in the factory or the state as a location of class conflict is one of the reasons socialist and social democratic ideas and political parties have lost support. Right-wing ideologues have had great success linking the left with bureaucratization and the domination of everyday life by experts and technocrats.

Of course, at another level the attack on the vestiges of socialism which exist in the welfare state relies upon commonsense in the way Bourdieu and Williams use the term.

Leaving the economy to market forces is presented as an eminently commonsensical thing to do, since the law of supply and demand appears perfectly natural. Likewise any sensible person knows that one must live within one's means, hence it is only commonsensical that governments must cut back. Commonsense indicates obvious simple solutions to problems which high-minded intellectuals and bureaucrats are too ignorant to see.

The working class is open to such ideological presentations because of its own preference for commonsense as a mode of thought, and the anti-intellectualism which accompanies it. This preference is a class reaction to the unequal way in which different kinds of knowledge are validated in society. However, it brings in its train an acceptance rather than critique of the underlying structures of society, thus, the cruel irony that a reaction to class inequality generates attitudes that actually serve to reproduce that inequality, and that a notion such as commonsense has travelled the circuit from being part of the rhetoric of political radicalism to the means by which the status quo is preserved.

CONCLUSION: HEGEMONY AND RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY  
CAPITALIST SOCIETY

How is it possible for a cultural text which fulfills a demonstrably ideological function, as a hegemonic work whose formal categories as well as its content secure the legitimation of this or that form of class domination -- how is it possible for such a text to embody a properly Utopian impulse, or to resonate a universal value inconsistent with the narrower limits of class privilege which inform its more immediate ideological vocation (Jameson 1981:288)?

By way of conclusion I want to draw out some of the political and theoretical implications of the preceding description and analysis. Although I have dealt with seemingly mundane practices and beliefs, I want to show how they, like a candle casting giant shadows, illuminate the complex and contradictory process whereby contemporary capitalist society reproduces itself.<sup>1</sup>

Before I proceed allow me to briefly summarize the primary argument of the thesis. I have stated that the White male working class in Northwestern Ontario is quite aware of its place in the social relations of production and actively expresses resistance to its subordinate position in various symbolic ways. The Boys and the other people I spoke with are not mystified as to their own lack of control over their lives, as dominant ideology theories would have it. There is a common saying in Thunder Bay: "You know the

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<sup>1</sup> The imagery is suggested by a passage in Taussig (1982:3).

golden rule; those who have the gold make the rules." The people I have discussed know they do not have the gold, and they have an idea about who does.

At the same time, however, it is evident that The Boys' understanding of their position in the social structure and their resistance to it is mediated by hegemonic cultural phenomena. It is refracted through anti-intellectualism and commonsense thought, through discourses about work and play, and ethnicity and gender, so that what originates as a penetration of the way power operates in contemporary society becomes a celebration of the immediate, a willful immersion in consumption and hedonism, a negative commentary on an ethnic "other"; and throughout all of this runs a strong bias for the masculine as opposed to the feminine. Yet I have maintained that the class experience of the white male working class is crucial if one is to understand the specific meaning these other discourses have for The Boys.

My analysis runs counter to the arguments of writers such as Gorz (1982), and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) who perceive class to be just one of several subject positions through which individuals constitute their identity. I have maintained that the specific meanings non-class discourses have for white male workers can only be discerned in the light of their class experience. The Boys' existence as consumers and taxpayers is predicated on their existence as wage labourers. Other subject positions are dominated by

work; for example, leisure is organized around and in opposition to work. The overwhelming priority given to commonsense is a result of working class experience in the labour process and of the division between mental and manual labour.

This is not to suggest that non-class discourses are determined by the "economic," that they do not have a real autonomy. But meaning is always context-specific, and work is an overwhelming aspect of the context within which working-class individuals live. The meaning of non-class discourses for working-class people is inextricably bound up with this fact. I am not claiming that working-class individuals are not constituted as subjects at one and the same time by a number of non-class discourses, but rather that they interpret non-class discourses in the light of their class experience.

These issues are directly related to the question of how domination and subordination are reproduced in Western capitalist nations. If the working-class people I have been discussing are as aware of their situation as I claim and are unhappy with it, why do they put up with it?

In recent years the concept most frequently used to discuss this question has been hegemony. The concept is taken from Gramsci who borrowed the term from Russian social democrats who were attempting to theorize the appropriate form of relationship between the proletariat and the

peasantry in the struggle against the Czarist state. They employed the concept of hegemony to describe the nature of an alliance between the working class and the peasants in which the former were dominant. This domination was not to be achieved by force, but through concessions and sacrifices extended by the working class to the peasantry. The hegemony of the proletariat in this alliance was conceived solely in political terms. The subjective identity of the two classes was thought to remain separate, being determined strictly at the level of the relations of production. Hegemony, according to this theory, was something apart from the subjectivity of either the working class or the peasantry (Anderson 1976:13-16; Laclau and Mouffe 1985:47-65).

Gramsci used the concept of hegemony inconsistently, sometimes following the meaning attributed to it by the Russian social democrats, and other times extending its terms of reference to include the idea of the cultural predominance of one class over another. In broadening the meaning of hegemony so as to include cultural as well as political dominance, Gramsci was trying to grasp the nature of bourgeois power in the Western capitalist nations.

According to Gramsci, in eastern Europe the state predominated over civil society and coercion played a crucial role in the domination of the ruling class over subordinate social groups and classes. In western European

nations, however, civil society predominated and the consent of the subordinate groups and classes was a crucial aspect of bourgeois domination. This situation demanded that different revolutionary strategies be pursued in Western and Eastern nations. In the East, a "war of manoeuvre", an armed insurrection, was the appropriate strategy, since to capture the state was to capture society. In the West, on the other hand, a more patient game had to be played; the appropriate strategy was a "war of position." The state was only an outer bulwark of society. To capture it was insufficient because the ideology of capitalism had saturated the institutions of civil society which were independent of the state. Proper cultural groundwork had to be carried out for these ostensibly non-political institutions had to be won over to the cause of socialism before power could be taken.

In other words, the preponderance of civil society over the State in the West can be equated with the predominance of 'hegemony' over 'coercion' as the fundamental mode of bourgeois power in advanced capitalism. Since hegemony pertains to civil society, and civil society prevails over the State, it is the cultural ascendancy of the ruling class that essentially ensures the stability of the capitalist order. For in Gramsci's usage here, hegemony means the ideological subordination of the working class by the bourgeoisie, which enables it to rule by consent (Anderson 1976:24).

Anderson criticizes this formulation of the nature of hegemony because of what he considers its overemphasis on the consensual side of bourgeois domination and because it locates the site of ideological domination within civil



society. For Anderson the ideological power of the bourgeoisie cannot be separated out from the nature of the state in Western capitalist nations:

... the general form of the representative State -- bourgeois democracy -- is itself the principal ideological lynchpin of Western capitalism, whose very existence deprives the working class of the idea of socialism as a different type of State, and the means of communication and other mechanisms of cultural control thereafter clinch this ideological 'effect'. ... The political and economic orders are ... formally separated under capitalism. The bourgeois State thus by definition 'represents' the totality of the population, abstracted from its distribution into social classes, as individual and equal citizens. In other words, it presents to men and women their unequal positions in civil society as if they were equal in the State. Parliament, elected every four or five years as the sovereign expression of popular will, reflects the fictive unity of the nation back to the nation as if it were their own self-government. The economic divisions within the 'citizenry' are masked by the juridical parity between exploiters and exploited, and with them the complete separation and non-participation of the masses in the work of parliament. This separation is then constantly presented and represented to the masses as the ultimate incarnation of liberty: 'democracy' as the terminal point of history. The existence of the parliamentary State thus constitutes the formal framework of all other ideological mechanisms of the ruling class (Anderson 1976:26).

Thus, according to Anderson one cannot partition the ideological functions of class power in Western capitalist nations between the state and civil society. The hub of the nexus of ideological and political hegemony is the parliamentary system, although Anderson admits that cultural control plays a critical complementary role, as do market relations and the labour process (Anderson 1976:27).

Anderson is also critical of the suggestion that coercion is not an important aspect of the exercise of class domination in the Western democracies. He argues that rather than think in terms of coercion and consent, it is more fruitful to use the notions of domination and determination. Force is always present in the final analysis, and this is what makes it possible for consent to be generated through ideological and cultural means. We cannot deny the dominant role of culture in the Western capitalist states, but neither should we forget about the determinant role of violence. Anderson uses an analogy with the monetary system to explain what he means. The monetary system is composed of two distinct media of exchange: gold and paper. The former is never seen in actual circulation, but it, in its absence, guarantees the value of the latter. In a monetary crisis, however, everybody reverts to gold. The political system in Western capitalist nations is similar.

The normal conditions of ideological subordination of the masses -- the day to day routine of parliamentary democracy -- are themselves constituted by a silent, absent force which gives them their currency: the monopoly of legitimate violence by the State (Anderson 1976:41).

There are two problems with Anderson's theory of bourgeois hegemony which I wish to address. Firstly, the way in which economic and political phenomena are distinguished in Western capitalist nations does, as he says, create difficulties for the perception of the actual

relationship between political and economic power. However, Anderson goes too far in his depiction of the ideological function of the elected parliament, and the discourses of nation and citizen. The people I have discussed are not fooled into believing that they actually exercise real power through the parliamentary system. I have shown how the sense of regionalism and the attitudes towards Native people are generated by The Boys' sense of powerlessness and by the overwhelming feeling that their votes do not make any difference. An aspect of their attitude about "Indians" involves an implicit critique of the welfare state and the bureaucracy that does not understand or seem to care about their local concerns. This is, also as I have shown, related to the inversion of the distinction between mental and manual labour, mental labour being very closely connected with the state bureaucracy. It may be true that in general the working-class men I have discussed do not perceive an alternative form of state to the present one, but that is different from saying that the subject position of citizen or voter overdetermines the subject position of class. They may not have an alternative, but they are not deeply committed to the present political structure. Their alienation is expressed in a deep suspicion of politics.

Equally problematic is Anderson's critique of the idea that the consent of subordinate classes is the primary factor in bourgeois domination in Western capitalist

nations. After his analogy between the monetary system based on paper currency and gold and the nature of consent and coercion in the Western capitalist state, he adds a proviso: "Just as gold as a material substratum of paper is a convention that needs acceptance as a media of exchange, so repression as guarantor of ideology itself depends on the assent of those who are trained to exercise it" (Anderson 1976:42). This statement is devastating for Anderson's argument for it returns us to the beginning of the circle. What comes first, consent or coercion? How is the cultural convention regarding the legitimate use of force formed? In other words, we have returned to the question of cultural hegemony.

Anderson cannot properly address this issue because his argument is based on a simplistic idea of the relationship between the hegemony of the dominant class and the consent of a subordinate class. Hegemony does not require a conscious acceptance by the subordinate groups of the ideological vision of society put forth by the dominant class. I have argued in this thesis that various discourses that contain certain ideological elements are the vehicle by which a subordinate social class expresses its opposition to the dominant social values. The ideological aspects of these discourses, however, limit their potential as a means of critically penetrating the appearance of social relations.

I have maintained that class experience is crucial in understanding the significance of non-class discourses for The Boys and other people I spoke with. This runs against a current trend which denies the relevance of class. One of the most trenchant criticisms of the utility of class is found in Nairn's (1977) discussion of nationalism. The failure to develop a theory of nationalism is seen by Nairn as Marxism's greatest failure. In his opinion, nationalism rather than class struggle has been the "motor of history" since the nineteenth century.

According to Nairn (1977:336-341), nationalism was born in the periphery of the world economic system as a reaction to colonialism and "development". The inhabitants of the hinterlands of the world system had nothing with which to resist this inundation except their culture, heritage, and language. This is why nationalism is inherently populist. Nationalism worked as a means of resistance because it provided the masses with

something real and important -- something that class consciousness postulated in a narrow intellectualist mode could never have furnished, a culture which however deplorable was larger, more accessible, and more relevant to mass realities than the rationalism of our Enlightenment inheritance (Nairn 1977:354).

While nationalism was "invented" in the periphery, it was adopted by the centre where real military and economic force could back up the claims of nationalist rhetoric (Nairn 1977:345-348). Thus, a phenomenon born as a tool of

resistance against colonial domination also became a weapon of colonial domination in the periphery and class domination in the metropolitan region of the world system.

In Nairn's eyes, Marxists have failed to construct an appropriate theory of nationalism because they have been preoccupied with class. The fault with Nairn's analysis lies in the phrase "class consciousness postulated in a narrow intellectualist mode" (1977:354). What he does not realize is that there are class reasons why subordinate groups in society express their class being, their class consciousness, in other than a narrow intellectualist mode and therefore why nationalism has an appeal to the masses when it is used both as a means of resistance and a means of domination. I have argued in this thesis that The Boys' class experience gives "popular" practices and ideas a certain connotation: namely, that they belong to them, to "the people", in the struggle between the people and the power bloc. Their class experience generates a desire to embrace the local, the immediate, the obvious. Thus, it is erroneous to oppose class and nationalism as Nairn does, or, in the context of this thesis, to oppose consciousness of class and consciousness of ethnicity, or consciousness of class and consciousness of popular culture.

Marxism as a formal political doctrine is a bourgeois intellectual product. As such, it is not, nor will it be popular among The Boys, at least not a formal intellectual

version of Marxism. Given their subordinate position in society, The Boys react by celebrating what they have -- their own ideas about what counts as knowledge, their own ideas about which cultural practices are important. This does limit their ability to develop a full and systematic critique of the system, but it is wrong to argue that this results from a passive acceptance of other non-class discourses. The Boys actively resist their subordination by creating another system of meaning. In this sense, they are cultural "bricoleurs", creating a meaningful universe in which they are morally and intellectually dominant.

The process by which they construct their own meaningful universe does, however, entail both horns of the dilemma of which Nairn speaks with regard to nationalism. The cultural elements they employ are prestrained by the meanings attached to them in other contexts. The Boys' use of the "Indian" to symbolically express their alienation from the Southern-based power bloc does reverberate with racist overtones, just as their use of lob-ball as a means of celebrating opposition to the dominant cultural themes associated with the labour process is bound up with consumerism and sexism, and their celebration of commonsense involves a tendency towards anti-intellectualism. Thus, the expression of class consciousness involves both progressive and regressive aspects. As in the image of the angel of history which Nairn borrows from Walter Benjamin to

illustrate the contradictory process of history. The Boys do move backwards into the future, intently searching in what is readily available to them for the means to make sense of the process and express their reaction to it.

This is one more example of how bourgeois hegemony operates. It is not simply a matter of repression but of generating forms of opposition which entail their own limitations. This is the meaning I discern in Foucault's comment:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (1980:119).

The process, however, is paradoxical. The opposition to their domination expressed by the White working-class men I have described and analyzed in this thesis generates its own limitations -- resistance furthers the domination. As Jameson (1981:281-297) argues, class consciousness in the present social order inevitably entails both utopian and ideological functions. The appeal of popular culture, commonsense, and ethnicity is that they seem to contain a means of expressing a desire for a different world. But subordinate classes and groups in society are trapped in a veritable hall of mirrors. In their desire to exit the hall of mirrors, and enter a world where things actually are what



they seem, they rush to the first doorway that appears but it only leads into another hall of mirrors. Onwards they go, trying ever harder to leave, and each time moving further away from the real exit.

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